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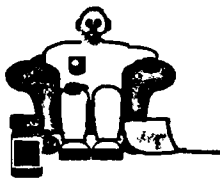
# **Understanding the ethical consumer: employing a frame of bounded rationality**

A thesis submitted for a PhD.

AUTHOR'S No. P2229698

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## Abstract

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This thesis is about ethical consumers. In some business circles ethical consumers are treated simply as one kind of consumer in a market society where a niche can be created to satisfy every preference. Conversely some advocates of more radical change propose consumer activism as part of a movement which will force ethical considerations into the decision-making of capitalist businesses and governments alike. Questions about ethics are central to consumer society.

Unlike most recent research into the 'green' or 'socially conscious' consumer that has been based on either extensive quantitative surveys or focus groups, the research presented here analyses consumer decisions in a social context. Sixteen case studies of ethical consumers in differing circumstances are developed in considerable detail. Starting from the theoretical observation that being an ethical consumer presents apparently daunting difficulties, especially with respect to decision making, the research uses bounded rationality theory to explain how these cases maintain their self-image as ethical. From these data I suggest thinking of ethical consumers as adopting coping strategies. Those contributing to the study were seen to be 'distancing' themselves from practices they consider unethical, 'integrating' their lives around addressing the issues current in ethical consumer discourse and/or 'rationalising' their ethical consumption against their acceptance of consumer capitalism. Each strategy can be shown to reduce the scope and/or difficulty of decision making.

Finally, consideration is given to the nature of ethical consumption as a political project. Individual consumers respond in diverse ways to a social discourse on any given ethical issue even where strong and clear consumption advice is given. I argue that ethical consumerism is limited by the capacity of individuals to give attention to more than a few actions. Its political significance is nevertheless enhanced by the unpredictability of consumer response.

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## **preface:**

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Most people are concerned about the environment, human justice and animal welfare. We are told this by market research. My experience through friendships and colleagues doesn't lead me to question it. Surely if this were the case, however, and if those people have some power as consumers, the wider society I experience should be more cautious about its environment, less accepting of extreme inequality, unforgiving of armaments production, less tolerant of animal abuse and so forth. It was this apparent paradox that brought me to the study of ethics in consumer society.

It may be obvious from this why I have very deliberately included myself in the society I study. In so far as we live in a consumerist society, I am a consumer and cannot study any social phenomenon as if that were not the case. When referring to consumers and ethical consumers the reader should not be surprised by my use of the inclusive 'we'.

Through the study I became less interested in why society seemed not to reflect the apparent views of the majority of its consumers, although I intend to contribute to the debate on this. What became more important was to see how ethical consumers, those who do follow attitudes into consumer activity, made decisions at all. This work became the study of the broad context within which people construed themselves as ethical consumers. As I began to present my findings, however, it became clear that in spite of the heterogeneity I wished to suggest, the view I was developing held policy implications beyond those of marketing ethical and sustainable products and services.

Through this the final chapters began to broaden towards a political philosophy of ethical consumerism.

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# 1. introducing the world of the 'ethical consumer'

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An introductory chapter to ethical consumption necessarily addresses consumption in contemporary society and a notion of ethics. Accordingly I start with a broad discussion of consumer capitalism. As I focus towards ethical consumption, questions arise which form the basis of my study. My introductory task is completed by discussing and setting out a workable concept of ethical consumption for the study. As with subsequent chapters except the forth and fifth, I end by summarising my argument.

## **1.1. consumer capitalism and ethical consumerism**

*'Strange', mused the director, as they turned away, 'strange to think that even in Our Ford's day most games were played without more apparatus than a ball or two and a few sticks and perhaps a bit of netting. Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption. It's madness. Nowadays the Controllers won't approve of any new game unless it can be shown that it requires at least as much apparatus as the most complicated of existing games.'*

(Aldous Huxley (1932) *Brave New World*, Ch. 3)

### **1.1.1. consuming the fruits of capitalism**

We could begin by gorging ourselves on a feast of statistics to illustrate the growth in consumerism in affluent countries: increasing per capita consumption of processed frozen foods, restaurant meals, cars, which in Europe surpassed households in numbers in the eighties<sup>1</sup>, air-miles, televisions, microwaves, videos, a proliferation home-appliances, etc., paralleled by a more or less constant rise in consumer expenditure<sup>2</sup>. In his seminal work, Alan Durning<sup>3</sup> takes such an approach to develop a powerful critique of consumer society. Here I want to outline some of the phenomena that are associated with consumption in affluent societies.

Food, clothing, accommodation, and consumer durables have become familiar commodities in capitalist economies. In addition in Britain we increasingly *buy* education,

healthcare, pensions and care when elderly; services which were previously in the public domain. We can now *buy* our exercise, our entertainment or our children's party; all previously in the personal domain. This trend is likely to continue into increasingly personal areas of our lives when we are able to *buy* an introduction to a potential partner or cold storage of our foetal offspring<sup>4</sup> until we have a window of opportunity to care for them. It is a feature of our society that commodification of areas of our lives that were previously outside the market progresses apace whilst domestic production declines<sup>5</sup>.

Concurrently, consumer products and services<sup>6</sup> differentiate over time<sup>7</sup>. At one time, for instance, cats caught and ate small rodents as their staple diets. Since the middle of the century, as most became 'pets', their diet was first supplemented or supplanted by butcher's offal, then tinned pet food. More recently easy to store packets of dried food, single meal sachets, food for old pets, for young pets and pet treats have all been successfully marketed. Many similar evolutionary histories can be constructed. Stephen Brown<sup>8</sup> relates the bewildered struggle of a customer to select a hair shampoo from a shelf of differentiated formulations. Impossible and probably irrelevant problems arise. Not only is the customer unsure how oily their hair has to be to warrant preparations for oily hair but is unsure how oily or dry their hair actually is.

In this proliferation, yesterday's luxuries are transformed into necessities<sup>9</sup>: refrigerators, televisions, mobile telephones and so on. Inter-generationally, these changes seem to be reinforced. Thus for one generation a mobile phone is a novelty and 'eating out' an occasional treat, for the next it is indispensable and a routine event. Durning suggests there is plenty of scope for continuation.

But as Bertell Ollman<sup>10</sup> notes our involvement in consumption encompasses more than the acts of purchase and consumption.



*With the explosive expansion of consumerism - of the amount of time, thought, and emotions spent in buying and selling, and in preparing for (including worrying about) and recovering from these activities - the market has become a dominant, if not the dominant, influence in how people act and think throughout the rest of their lives.*

Thus we now concede, or perhaps lavish, much attention on consumption. Colin Campbell<sup>11</sup> draws our notice to our endless daydreams of pleasurable consumption experiences. Jean Baudrillard's vision of consumers lost in the futile pursuit of difference in a media dominated world of 'free floating signifiers' may be, as Mike Poster<sup>12</sup> says, over-generalising insights. Still surely there is some resonance in both Baudrillard's and Campbell's opposing ideas. The notion that the pursuit of difference is an engine of consumption is difficult to escape. Product life-cycles shorten whilst palaces of consumption proliferate; hours and days available for consumption maximise whilst methods of payment simplify.

I must draw back from hyperreality<sup>13</sup>. All this is introduced not in postmodern disregard of the accompanying poverty in affluent societies but to establish the contemporary significance of consumption in such societies. Indeed definitions of poverty reinforce such views by arguing, and I would not disagree, that poverty exists where people are excluded from society because they cannot afford the commercial products that would enable them to take part<sup>14</sup>. The point I wish to establish is that as in other affluent countries a very significant proportion of people in Britain, the focus of this study, have experienced, and broadly welcomed, an increase in the scope (commodification), frequency and extent of their consumption made possible by a continued rise in real disposable income. Although the term 'consumer' was overworked in the Thatcher years, for most people there is some real sense in which they have increasingly become consumers.

### 1.1.2. concerning the fruits of consumer capitalism

Such an affluent society, 'post-scarcity society' as Anthony Giddens<sup>15</sup> calls it, has come about because of the prodigious productive power of capitalism. However, consumer capitalism presents new contradictions, opportunities and difficulties. It is not surprising that most people, Peter Lunt & Sonja Livingstone<sup>16</sup> tell us, view the changes with pleasure and some foreboding. The pleasure in consumption is not easily dismissed as simply immoral as Campbell<sup>17</sup> illustrates. The foreboding arises from the loss of tradition but is also associated with what Ursula Hansen & Ulf Schrader<sup>18</sup> term the "aggravation of social and environmental problems resulting from consumption". At root there is a feeling, perhaps Puritan in origin, that "[t]oday's reckless consumption may have to be paid for sooner or later"<sup>19</sup>.

However, there are competing ideological understandings of this situation. One view argues that by our escalating production and consumption in the affluent parts of the world combined with poverty elsewhere in the Majority World<sup>20</sup>, we are likely to be building up to irreversible human and environmental problems. We must plan to correct or regulate these trends and develop a *sustainable consumerism*, even though, and precisely because, we are unsure of their nature. What has become known as the *precautionary principle* additionally requires that we must eschew developments with an uncertain and potentially dramatic outcome.

The opposing view argues that we cannot foresee difficulties primarily because the models we use to project events are inadequate and faulty. Thus plans we make to address poorly perceived futures will necessarily be dysfunctional and may even aggravate situations<sup>21</sup>. From this *laissez faire* perspective, though well intentioned, we do more harm than good by planning and intervening.

I should include a third group of ideologies, Marxist, anarchistic and ecologicistic, that assert that the contradictions arise from capitalist production or industrialism. Resolution

is therefore only possible through a restructuring of the economy along one of many competing formulations.

These are, of course, brief generalised outlines but are necessary to illustrate the unavoidable political dimension to any study of consumer capitalism. *To study the ethical consumer at all* is to imply an ideological stance. Because as Giddens<sup>22</sup> argues, “there is unlikely to be a general revolt against consumerism”, this work takes the study of consumers to be of continuing importance. I concur with the first view above which is predominant in contemporary society that the misgivings alluded of have a very real basis but with the caveat that neither consumers nor experts have solutions to the ethical problems posed<sup>23</sup>.

### **1.1.3. the ‘rise’ of ethical consumerism**

Accompanying this increasing consumption in affluent societies have been signs of consumer concern. Market research has consistently since the 1980s and even through economic recessions<sup>24</sup> reported significant proportions of the population as being concerned with these aggravated social and environmental problems. In 1994 NOP reported 56% saying they “make an effort to buy Fair Traded products where possible”, a year latter *Gallop* found 78% agreeing that “issues such as the environment and animal welfare are important in influencing what I buy and where I shop” and *Mintel* (widening its research issues) reported sizeable minorities concerned as consumers with corporate responsibility including involvement in armaments<sup>25</sup>. Significant increases in vegetarianism, which, of course, translates into consumer behaviour, the success of ventures like the Body Shop and the ethical rebranding of the Cooperative Bank, and consumer action as in the campaign against Shell or in response to a number of child labour issues, have firmly planted ethics on the business agenda. According to one business analyst “[e]nvironmental issues have grown from fringe radicalism to become one of the most important marketing issues”<sup>26</sup>. This goes beyond recognising the consumers’ collective potential ability to cause havoc in business, and these businesses

taking avoiding action. Consumers can also prodigiously reward producers who appear to be acting ethically. In its market incarnation, 'ethics' tends to be reduced from a philosophical debate to a marketing opportunity.

In its collective form, ethical consumerism appears as a broad political project to bring pressure to bear on producers by encouraging and marshalling consumer behaviour in favour or against certain products or groups of products. Yiannis Gabriel & Tim Lang<sup>27</sup> describe this as the 'fourth wave' of consumer activism, following the cooperative movement, value-for-money campaigns and anti-corporatism. Mika Pantzar<sup>28</sup> says that during the 1980s 'oil crisis', academics became interested in how consumers could be induced to use less energy whilst in the 1990s the 'waste crisis' has concentrated minds on consumers recycling. Such interests have, through the Brandtland Report, closely associated *sustainability* with *ethics* in consumption.

How far theoretical conceptualisation of such a phenomenon should follow the neo-classical economists notion of 'sovereign consumer' is an issue which will be addressed in chapter nine. It is against this contentious background that terms seeking to describe consumer activism have progressed through 'green consumerism', 'socially conscious consumerism' to 'eco-consumerism'. Recently the term 'ethical consumerism' has been adopted by some activist organisations, market researchers and academics to encompass a range of consumer behaviours where people seem to act upon more than self-interest.

I suggest three themes have developed from these discourses: the ethical consumer as *marketing opportunity*; the ethical consumer as *consumer activist* and the ethical consumer in *sustainable consumption*. Each of these themes has its descriptive element, noting the 'new' phenomenon but also has a prescriptive aspect. Debates have opened on how to motivate consumers, respectively, to buy ethical products, to boycott and boycott and to engage in new forms of sustainable consumption.

## **1.2. questions about being an ethical consumer**

### **1.2.1. the words / deeds debate**

As Lisa Troy<sup>29</sup> says of the American experience, however:

*Despite numerous studies citing that majorities of consumers include environmental concerns in their shopping decisions there is little evidence that actual purchase behaviour reflects such attitudes. Major corporations are investing millions of dollars, however, in developing and marketing environmental products in response to both consumer demand and regulatory requirements.*

Similar patterns have been noted in all affluent societies and not only environmental products but ethical products more generally have not performed according to the promises of the attitude surveys. Competing explanations for what has become known as the words / deeds inconsistency are offered. They are reviewed by Folk Ölander & John Thøgersen<sup>30</sup>.

The view taken here is that a rounded picture of a person is necessary to understanding their behaviour as consumer. This has particular ramifications for the nature of the study, to which I shall necessarily return. However, by taking a journalistic glimpse here I can move the central argument on.

### **1.2.2. on being an ethical consumer: ‘a pointless oxymoron’?**

On the day I began to write this part of my thesis the *Guardian*<sup>31</sup> published an article in its Consumer section: ‘Charles Jennings struggles to be a consumer of conscience’. Setting aside scepticism about possible journalistic devices, Jennings’ story is ideal to develop the next stage of my argument. He has, he tells us, been an uncritical consumer but, and he does not dwell on the reasons, is looking to change his ways. However, with “hundreds of boycotts for the ethical consumer to choose from”, many conundrums and a few ‘placebos’ how can he be virtuous? He is not, he says, among those who know about these things and he concludes, facetiously, can only start with something small: cutting down on his Nescafé<sup>32</sup> intake.

What is remarkable therefore is that given all the difficulties ethical consumers make decisions at all. I will develop the theoretical decision making environment<sup>33</sup> later in the thesis. It is sufficient here to note that it is more intriguing to understand how ethical consumers make decisions at all than why there might be a gap between incomplete attitudes expressed to a researcher and behaviour in a complex world. This concern forms the basis of the *primary question* which I address in this thesis:

**In the cases where consumers *do* make decisions on ethical grounds, how do they do so in potentially so daunting a decision making environment?**

But Jennings raises a further point which reflects back on the debate on sustainable consumption. He wonders whether the term ethical consumer is a 'pointless oxymoron'; there is a seeming tension between ethics and 'Western consumption'; relatively affluent consumption patterns are inherently unethical. This raises questions about the philosophical understandings which people bring to their consumption and my first subsidiary question:

**How do ethical consumers sustain their notion of ethics in their consumption?**

**1.2.3. difficult decisions and limited attention: bounded rationality**

I am concerned therefore with decision making in daunting circumstances. I have accepted that the resolution of the so called 'words / deeds inconsistency' lies in the fuller revelation of the subject's attitudes and behaviour, so I am also concerned with the broad context within which those decisions take place. This raises a further subsidiary question:

**In what broad context do people give attention to ethics in their consumption?**

Theories of human decision making in complex situations where attention is limited were first addressed by Herbert Simon<sup>34</sup> in the middle of the century in response to the empirical failure of classical theory. Coining the term *bounded rationality* he argued that people's behaviour could be seen as quite rational given that they do not have perfect knowledge. Many strands have developed with some, including Simon, pursuing the *hard* mechanics of decision making. Others have sought ways to explain what previously appeared to be irrational social behaviour. Given the nature of the enquiry set out in this introduction I have adopted the latter *soft* approach to underpin this thesis. I will, for instance, expect ethical consumers to simplify decisions in a variety of ways but not to be able to model the processes. All this is set out in the two subsequent chapters.

#### **1.2.4. systems of consumption and theory of stoppage**

I have argued that decisions are not made in isolation. The context within which they are made demands some attention. Here two interlinked theories will be argued as relevant. From within systems theory Pantzar<sup>35</sup> argues that consumer items are to be understood as interlinked. In Pantzar's evolutionary theory of goods, choice of transport, shopping place, residence are all connected and impact on each other. Previous decisions and the human environment develop into self-organising patterns which impact on and restrict present decisions.

In this way research which places the consumer in immediate structural and social contexts can consider not only what motivates but also what stops ethical consumption. John Langrish<sup>36</sup> coins the word 'stoppage' and in his recommendation of case study methodology points out that an alternative linear causality approach would fail to recognise such a phenomenon. Drawing on these theories I therefore seek to understand:

**What, if anything, stops consumers behaving in accord with their  
ethical beliefs?**

### **1.2.5. the philosophy of ethical consumers**

I have considered the nature of the consumer capitalism in which concepts of the ethical consumer have arisen. Until this point, to sustain the argument, I have introduced only the vague concept that ethical consumers act upon more than self-interest. But I must presume that some consumers have a notion of what is meant by ethics in their consumption. The journalist Jennings for instance asks in desperation “how can I be virtuous?” In addressing that issue they become concerned, as Peter Singer says, with the philosophy of “... how we ought to live.”<sup>37</sup>; what consumer behaviour should we consider to be ethical or unethical and on what grounds? I am therefore interested to ask:

#### **What philosophy do people apply to their ethical behaviour in their consumption?**

I might for instance find ethical consumers evoke a maxim, or set of rules, against which each action is to be evaluated, a consequentialist theory which holds certain value outcomes as paramount and actions which maximise these values as ethical, or a set of virtues the application of which constitutes ethical action. How people philosophically rationalise their actions must surely contribute to an understanding of their behaviour<sup>38</sup>.

### **1.2.6. consumer exit and voice: market democracy?**

Having grounded my understanding of ethical consumers in empirical research into decision making by individuals in its immediate context, I return to consider the broader view. Each of the debates set out in the first section of my introduction carries expectations: that consumers will create a profitable niche<sup>39</sup>; that consumers will indicate (ethical) problems and contribute to the regulation of the market and; that consumers will contribute to the creation of a sustainable development.



Such expectations rest on conceptualisations of consumers as 'sovereign', voters endorsing or exiting from products or activists voicing their support or opposition<sup>40</sup>. This raises policy issues and forms the basis of a broader question:

**In what way does, and potentially could, ethical consumerism  
contribute to indicative / political regulation of the market and  
sustainability?**

With these increasingly widening questions set out I must address a parallel issue and ask in greater depth what is meant by *ethical* in consumption.

### ***1.3. applying philosophy to ethical consumption***

There is, of course, a long philosophical engagement with the notion of human ethics and therefore the discipline would seem to offer the most fruitful starting point for any approach to the notion of the ethical consumer. Indeed the concern of the present study occurs within "[t]he marked revival of interest in applied ethics that has taken place in Western philosophical thought over the past two decades ...."<sup>41</sup>. A number of parallel reviews in consumer theory which have sought to derive a basis in philosophy will be introduced in the next chapter. However, it is neither possible nor intended here to provide a complete philosophical discourse, but rather to explore relative issues and decide upon an underpinning to the present study. However, in considering the three main philosophical approaches to ethics referred to above, namely: deontology, consequentialism and virtue theory, I shall be doing more than seeking to establishing a working definition of the ethical consumer. Other relevant philosophical issues will be raised.

It is for instance of some concern in this study as to whether ethics is based on reason as Immanuel Kant argues or as in David Hume's formulation on emotion and passion. The former consumer might be expected to be demanding of documentary evidence upon which s/he would act more or less predictably in accordance with objectively discernible

ethical values. On the other hand, were “[m]orality more properly felt than judg’d (sic.) of ...”<sup>42</sup> the latter consumer might be expected to be unmanageable<sup>43</sup>. However, to enter the Hume, Kant debate would be to commit the present study to an entirely different course. I must simply note that this is a central discourse to which I must return in chapter eight. Crucially to the present study, Singer argues that it is important that ‘ethical’ is seen to inform behaviour. If this is not so the concept loses meaning: “For if *knowing* what is right did not carry with it a tendency to motivate us to *do* right, ethics would seem to have lost its point.”<sup>44</sup>

### 1.3.1. deontology: a duty to consume ethically

Hansen & Schrader<sup>45</sup> argue that there is a moral imperative for individuals to consider their consumption because they have, however limited, a degree of freedom to choose and those choices have effect. They invoke Kant’s Categorical Imperative to underpin their argument: “Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it would be a universal law”<sup>46</sup>. Such a formulation would require informed and active consumers. Likewise, Durning’s tirade against consumer society advocates the now well established adaptation of Kant’s non-consequentialist philosophy. This now asserts that “... each generation should meet its needs without jeopardising the prospects of future generations to meet their needs”<sup>47</sup> even though the consequences for some in the present generation might be dire. Such a single rule has elegance.

However following rules deliberately without attention to consequences elicits classical criticisms. The deontologist, for illustration, might refuse to buy products made using child labour. After all, she would not wish her own children to labour, less still in exploited conditions, and must generalise this rule. What, however, if the fate of the children is worsened by her action?<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, attempts to define workable criteria from such a general rule as the sustainability principle are marked not least by commercial interference, political disagreement<sup>49</sup> and presentational difficulties. Perhaps more importantly, the growing

acceptance of uncertainty has turned scientific disagreement into a cause for delay or inaction in setting criteria. In general it has proved, as yet, difficult to move from deontological formulations to good practice.

It is not only the application of rules but also the philosophical interpretation that has proved difficult. Kant<sup>50</sup> argues that action is moral *only* if it is undertaken because of the moral law which enjoins it. This is so because pleasure, including pleasure in the action, is not moral. Such an assertion presents significant difficulties for those, say, who would wish to argue that we ought to seek a simpler, more ethical lifestyle, which would in fact, they argue, be more pleasurable. Or, at a more mundane level, would taking pleasure in helping people by buying fair traded products negate the morality in the act? The central problem here is whether an act is moral simply because it is right in itself, irrespective of whether anyone gains or loses by it, or whether, as Singer<sup>51</sup> would have us believe, when we are all, including the perpetrator, made happier by it.

### **1.3.2. a utilitarian concern for the consequences of consumption**

The utilitarians have not fared better. Henry Sidgwick<sup>52</sup> sets out the most familiar position thus:

*By Utilitarianism is here meant the ethical theory, that the conduct which, under any given circumstances, is objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole; that is, taking into account all whose happiness is affected by the conduct.*

There are very obvious difficulties, which Sidgwick acknowledges<sup>53</sup>, in measuring happiness and in predicting the outcome of courses of action. The considerable uncertainty associated, say, with environmental matters aggravates this problem. In spite of Sidgwick's assertion that 'posterity' is legitimately to be included in the utilitarian's remit, the charge may be levelled at those utilitarians who postulated the individual

pursuit of happiness as leading to the greatest good of the greatest number that a major factor in generating humanity's environmental difficulties has been that very pursuit.

However, in the classical critique of utilitarianism, attending to consequences without concern for the righteousness of actions presents difficulties. Thus, to continue with the example of child labour employment, the utilitarian might buy products made using child labour since not to do so would almost certainly cause more pain. She might also have reasonable, but not certain, expectation that in the long term trade conditions would improve<sup>54</sup>. At what point, however, should she, if ever, withdraw support for iniquitous producer practices?

Consequentialism usefully guides us to consider our external environment and particularly our effect on the happiness of others. However, Richard Norman<sup>55</sup> draws together the work of a number of critics to argue that we simply cannot ignore our own morality in this. He shows that it is not a case of *choosing* between the happiness of the many and our own, perhaps egoistic, morals. Our own unhappiness as ethical consumers, buying cheap products in the expectation that it will (eventually) benefit child workers, is not simply to be weighed in the generality of happiness. That we are concerned at all is because we are moral agents. Indivisible from that moral agency is the personal integrity on which it is partly based. We cannot, therefore, entirely derive our notion of the ethical consumer from an external environment.

### **1.3.3. the virtuous ethical consumer**

The deontologist and consequentialist make seemingly cold calculations of what it is right to do. We carry out our duty not to buy the products of child labour, or calculate that the consequences of buying the product are preferable, and get on with our life. Virtue theorists argue that such formulations take little account of our motives. They ask what we should do but also what should we feel in such situations and what kind of people we should be.

Faced, again, with the problem of child labour Jennings might be advised by a virtue theorist to be compassionate, act generously and with courage. Clearly he should be concerned with the children's plight, not shrink from paying more for a product if that were appropriate and not overly prioritise his own interest. But however useful such injunctions are they do not resolve the immediate dilemma: what and what not to buy.

At the theoretical level, the difficulty with virtue theory lies in defining what are the virtues upon which to base our ethical consumer decisions. Philosophers do not fully agree. Perhaps Iris Murdoch's<sup>56</sup> struggle to derive virtues from the practice of *art* illustrates the subjective nature of the exercise.

It may be indicative of the difficulties involved in pressing a philosophical position into the service of a research project that Doria Stitts<sup>57</sup> reviews philosophical writings to underpin her study of *Ethical Judgements in Consumer Decision-Making* but ultimately she draws no conclusions as to the value of her review. Her own work, in which she takes a deontological position, is only related to her review by inference.

I have not found within the applied ethics discipline work dealing specifically with ethical consumerism and therefore some interpretation of general philosophical positions has been attempted above. I conclude that there is no single position on ethics which can objectively underpin this study. As Singer concludes, the field of argument has been clarified and the positions narrowed but fundamental differences remain, for instance, between advocates of attention to rules and consequences<sup>58</sup>. Additionally much of philosophy remains too abstract to deliver clear ethical courses of (consumer) action.

Singer accepts that there has been an "... apparent failure to make progress in ethics ..."<sup>59</sup>. Nevertheless he ventures that "[w]hilst distinct societies obviously do hold different ethical views on many subjects, it is now clear that on some important points, almost all societies are in agreement."<sup>60</sup> Because, for Singer, ethics derives not from a deity but from a common evolutionary heritage there cannot be an objective ethics upon which to base

our study. Since the dispute between competing philosophical traditions has not been resolved, we are looking, Singer says, for "... the kind of limits that we can put on desires if they are to count as ethical, and whether these limits are sufficient to allow us to reach ... agreement on what we ought to do."<sup>61</sup> Accordingly I have concluded that there can be no single objective philosophical basis for (consumer) ethics. What follows is a review of the attempts to derive a notion of ethics in relation to consumers or in closely related areas.

#### **1.4. what is ethical consumption?**

Can philosophy help to define the scope of our ethical concerns? Whilst few, and none of importance, would uphold Aristotle's opinion that justice is due to humans in proportion to their social rank, what of animals? In the late eighteenth century, William Godwin<sup>62</sup> was affirming that "[a] man (sic.) is of more worth than a beast, because, being possessed of higher faculties, he is capable of a more refined and genuine happiness."

Recognising that "[s]ome will resist this suggestion", Singer, a strong proponent of the inclusion of non-human animals in our thinking, writes:

*... I am suggesting that we abandon the assumption that ethics is uniquely human.*

*..... We have always been reluctant to recognise similarities between our own behaviour and that of non-human animals.*<sup>63</sup>

In support of this view he points to a succession of failed projects in which he notes particular attributes said to differentiate between human and non-human animals.

"I am arguing that we extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognise should be extended to all members of our own species"<sup>64</sup> and we need to consider our ethics "... from the point of view of those most disadvantaged by our attitudes, and the practices that follow from those attitudes." He contends that the challenge to those who would argue against equality with other animal is to find "... some relevant fact that justifies the inequality of humans and other animals."<sup>65</sup> Many

utilitarians would agree<sup>66</sup>, but the matter is unresolved with some resisting extension and others wishing to take it further<sup>67</sup>.

Even if we were able to decide, as many people are, upon the scope of our engagement we may be concerned that our own small actions will have little effect. We may reason that there is, therefore, no point in worrying. Jonathan Glover<sup>68</sup> (successfully, I think) demolishes two common arguments for inaction. He acknowledges that “[h]uge problems sometimes produce an irrational paralysis of the imagination ...[that leads to a] ... temptation to despair and do nothing.”<sup>69</sup> In response to the assertion that individual action will make insignificant difference, however, he points out that “.... the difference that is small compared to the size of the whole problem may be one that in other contexts we would think worth taking very seriously ...”<sup>70</sup>

Further, Glover invokes the principle of divisibility against the argument that ethical action will make no difference. He says<sup>71</sup>:

*“... in cases where harm is a matter of degree, sub-threshold actions are wrong to the extent that they cause harm, and where a hundred acts like mine are necessary to cause a detectable difference I have caused one-hundredth of that detectable harm.”*

Moreover, he asserts, we may not argue that if we didn’t do it someone would because side effects should be considered especially where these may induce spiralling effects<sup>72</sup>.

Although the philosophical positions offer some insights, the problems faced by the philosophers in defining ethical human attitudes and behaviour, often simply transfer to the attempt to define the ethical consumer. The dilemmas, however, remain; of definition: e.g., are we to consider the position of other animals as well as humans; of degree: where are we to draw the line or locate a logical position between the extremes and; of interpretation: how are we to mediate between competing views?

#### **1.4.1. subjectivism: an empirical approach**

The subjective position holds that each individual has her/his own moral code.

Ultimately the only valid definition of ethical behaviour, whether in consumption or otherwise, is that held by the individual. In practice such approaches have led to attempts to aggregate individual views.

In considering investment, for instance, Sue Ward points out that “[d]efinitions ... of exactly what is socially responsible investment and what is not will vary”<sup>73</sup> but it will involve the application of non-financial or ethical criteria. Definitions are, she argues, individual and defined both negatively and positively. However, for the purposes of the service of a group or trust investment, it is a legal requirement that collective agreement must be sought. Ward offers a structured approach to achieving this. For most practical purposes the agreement must be unanimous. In this case a collective understanding of, and response to, ethical issues is recognised. In the same way, when an investor buys into an ethical investment fund s/he is subscribing to a set of pre-determined criteria. Thus Ward respects individual concepts but seeks to aggregate them for presentational purposes.

It is similarly logical to argue that the ethical issues upon which *consumers* will act, or at least express concerns, will vary, but will involve the application of non-financial or ethical criteria. In consumer terms this then excludes consideration of product price. Because of the different context of investment, the primary conventional purpose of which is to make profit, the negative definition for ethical consumers must be widened to exclude conventional economic criteria such as quality of product, service and individually enjoyed benefits accruing to the product. An ethical purchase then, is one where the consumer decision takes into account some consideration(s) apart from utility to themselves. However, in the remaining plethora of issues which consumers will cite as exhibiting a moral aspect there will be a wide variety in scope, strength of attitude,



intention, and application such that their collection under a single heading might seem imprudent. Some issues of a particularly contestable nature will be included.

Attempts have been made to define the ethical, or more usually environmental, 'space'. These have usually taken the form of relatively extensive surveys asking respondents to define consumer situations which they believe to have ethical or environmental implications. In attempting to derive an 'ethical space' from 'consumption experiences' in the USA, Elizabeth Cooper-Martin & Morris Holbrook<sup>74</sup> developed a bi-dimensional model along selfish-selfless and active-passive axes.

Neither the methodology nor the results are entirely convincing. The consumption experiences reported could not be considered in any way representative since they were defined by business studies and marketing students. Additionally, the active-passive categorisation is weak. For example, an experience such as not buying disposable diapers (nappies) which gets defined as passive must logically be translated into an *extremely active experience* of buying and using reusable diapers.

Although, as the researchers point out, the reported experiences cover "a wide diversity of ethical consumption experiences."<sup>75</sup> and most of the expected issues are included, patriotism also features strongly. This illustrates a weakness in methods based on the individual self-definition approach. 'Patriotism' is a highly contentious issue. It could, for instance, be argued that it was ethically correct to boycott 'foreign' goods to minimise energy consumption or alternatively to safeguard 'national' employment. The latter would certainly seem not to be generalisable as Kant would require because it would lead to retaliatory protectionism.

In so far as the 'ethical space' was validly produced it represents only an unrefined collection of 'ethical spaces'. It seems to me to reflect Jeremy Bentham's disparaging description of "... community [as a] fictitious *body*, composed of individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members*. The interests of the community then

is, what? - the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.”<sup>76</sup> In line with such an individualist view Cooper-Martin & Holbrook make no attempt to gain a consensus on issues to be included or excluded and its value, I would argue, must therefore be limited.

Conversely I suggest a collective view of ethics with regard to consumption may be defined. It will however be specific to a given community, held by a majority within that community in differing intensities but not universally held. Most importantly it will be dynamic. Against this the individualist approach gives little space to the interactive formation of views between an individual and the society within which they were formed. Subjectivism is in danger of slipping into complete relativism where ethics becomes no more than another choice. To reformulate Amitai Etzioni’s<sup>77</sup> criticism of market liberal economics, the ethics of an unsocialised individual would be entirely unrecognisable to us. To speak of an individual’s subjective ethics is valid but to use this concept as a tool for understanding humanity is, I would argue, to commit a high abstraction.

#### **1.4.2. collective narratives: activists, experts and market researchers**

Whereas the subjectivist view seems only to be uncritically aggregating individuals’ concepts of ethical consumption experiences, the realist position holds that an objective morality may be possible. Michael Smith argues, I think convincingly, that a moral attitude may be seen as that which would be held “under more idealised conditions of reflection.”<sup>78</sup> His argument is designed to resolve the problem of the derivation of ethics reviewed above. This allows him to believe that an objective morality exists to the extent that there is a convergence of such views within society. It may therefore be appropriate to look for overlapping collective narratives.

A major factor within the rise of environmental and ethical debates has been the ‘activist’. “Overall, these were defined [in studies] as the most concerned about ‘green’ issues and the most pro-active in terms of personal action.”<sup>79</sup> Activists or Strong Ethicals were self-

reported in proportions as high as 26% by *Mintel*<sup>80</sup> and 22% by *HPI Research*<sup>81</sup>, from samples of the British consumer population. It may be argued that there is a *prima facie* case for defining the dimensions for ethical consumerism by reference to activist behaviour<sup>82</sup>. It is they who derived and promoted the concept before it was in common usage and it is they who have the longest experience of building and refining the concept. The activists may be considered to define the ethical consumer through the relevant informational magazines. In Britain this would be the *Ethical Consumer*. However, the circulation of this magazine has remained small (about 5,000) and a similar magazine, the *New Consumer*, ceased publication early in 1995. Although the issues are defined mostly by the concerns of the magazine's clients, both by recording enquiries and periodic questionnaire surveys, they are also filtered by a subjective political element<sup>83</sup>; the collective view of the staff. Additionally the issue categories have temporal and geographical aspects. *Ethical Consumer* has recently revised its categories to subsume less active categories into others and differentiate new ones. These are set out in Table 1.1. Sister magazines in USA and Holland, for instance, have very similar but significantly different concerns. Each of these categories is, of course, further defined by the editors with regard to content and criteria of application. 'Workers' Rights' is, for example, the category under which fair trading issues are taken.

**Table 1.1 issues screened by the *Ethical Consumer* magazine (UK) as revised in 1995**

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*Environment:* Pollution, Environmental Policy, Nuclear Power, Other.

*Animals:* Animal Testing, Factory Farming, Other Animal Rights.

*People:* Oppressive Regimes, Workers' Rights, Irresponsible Marketing, Armaments.

*Extras:* Political Donations and other information 'not available in a sufficiently consistent form'.

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In spite of the national and temporal variations, categories which have been developed in this way should, I would argue, be considered to exhibit considerable social validity. They are 'expert' categories developed by people with accumulated knowledge of the

area, are supported by a small but significant population and are not, as I will show, dissimilar to those pragmatically used in marketing.

In a market economy where producers are oriented towards carving out ever more specific niches in a fragmenting consumer society, there is of course a business interest in 'what the consumer wants' and therefore also in the ethical consumer. Market researchers have become interested beyond the traditional product characteristics of price, quality and convenience. More recently a whole range of consumer 'benefits' have been identified which include mood repair<sup>84</sup>, guilt alleviation<sup>85</sup> etc. Although an understanding of such constructs is sought, the exact definition is less important in marketing than their effectiveness as a segmentation tool. Relevant questions are: is the proposed segment accessible, sufficiently coherent, of sufficient size and sufficiently differentiated to constitute a market?

In these terms, among the problems of assessing, say, the 'cruelty-free' market, philosophical issues such as whether animals are sentient beings and, if so have rights, or whether humans, as a dominant species, have a duty towards them or notional contract with them are of little importance. What constitutes 'cruelty-free' as an ethical segment in marketing is a measure of market size and relative cohesion or fragmentation of its constituent movements: animal rights, compassion in farming and so on. In addition, a 'common sense' notion of selfless behaviour held by market researchers is no doubt employed along with a 'common sense' notion of 'ethical' derived mostly from its oppositional position with respect to the economic rationale of price, quality and convenience which previously informed the discipline. It is because these constructions are *reactive* that I consider the way that the ethical consumer is conceptualised within market research to give a good reflection of the social concept and to have particular relevance for this study.

However, market research may be divided into two approaches. Some research is undertaken to produce a commercially viable report exploring a particular market or

group of market opportunities. This will seek to give a broad and comprehensive overview. By contrast, client or multi-client led research will often pursue interests which are very specific to that clients needs. They will often, therefore, be of little use in any other circumstances. It is the former, of course, that constitutes the more interesting formulation here.

The categories of concern developed by *Mintel Intelligence* in 1994, just before my study began, are set out in Table 1.2. These are the most comprehensive I found by a major market research organisation.

*Table 1.2 Mintel Ethical Consumer Study 1994*

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<i>Environmental issues:</i> Ozone layer, river / sea pollution, forest destruction, recycling, greenhouse gasses nuclear power and acid rain.
<i>Animal issues:</i> animal testing and factory farming.
<i>Ethical:</i> irresponsible selling, oppressive regimes, armaments, political contributions and selling policy of company.

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In practice I believe that there is sufficient common ground between these categories and those of the activist / experts, presented in Table 1.1, to suggest what I will call a *conventional* understanding of the concerns of ethical consumers. Of course there are interesting differences of emphasis. For example, in the third group of concerns, I infer that Mintel sees producers facing *Ethical* dilemmas whereas Ethical Consumer refers to threats to *People* from producer activities. However, the listed concerns exhibit considerable similarity: irresponsible selling, oppressive regimes, armaments and political donations.

In this thesis a reference to conventional ethical consumerism will mean concern with a broad, loosely defined and developing range of issues expressed by *both* market research organisations and activist groups. I have chosen *Mintel Intelligence* and *Ethical Consumer* magazine to represent these because they are both respected and leading organisations in their fields.

### **1.4.3. the structure of my thesis**

Having justified and clarified my research field in this chapter I need to introduce the reader to the structure of the rest of my thesis. In my second chapter I review the literature of consumer theory and research in a very broad sense. In practice, this review, of course, preceded and informed the writing of my introduction. The third and fourth chapters set out, respectively, my methodology and fieldwork.

Chapter five introduces my sixteen case studies with synopses and photographs. In the next two chapters I draw on my data to set out in detail and analyse ethical consumers' decision making and motivation before returning in chapter eight to answer the questions about individual ethical consumers posed in this chapter.

The penultimate chapter sets my work in the wider social context and asks whether or nor we should think of ethical consumers as heroes of consumption. In chapter ten I look forward to future research, future prospects for ethical consumption and, by way of reiterating my main conclusions, advising the would-be ethical consumer.

### **1.5. chapter summary**

Consumption as an aspect of most people's lives in the affluent societies of consumer capitalism is acknowledged as having become increasingly important. Much has been written about people as consumers, about the apparent rise of ethical attitudes and about the apparently incommensurate consumer behaviour. This may be seen as important not least in relation to contemporary environmental and social problems and therefore attracts competing economic, social and political interpretations. It is assumed here that to have a concern for these issues is, *prima facie*, legitimate.

The central question to be addressed by this study is, to reiterate, in the cases where consumers *do* make decisions on ethical grounds, how do they do so in potentially so daunting a decision making environment? However, consumer decisions are not to be seen in isolation and therefore there are four contextual questions concerning the way consumers sustain their notion of themselves as ethical, the attention they give and

importance they attribute to ethical consumption and what, if anything, stops them from changing their consumer behaviour further. At the broadest level, I wish to draw upon my research and that of others to contribute to the discussion of policy questions about the significance and role of ethical consumerism in a market economy.

Whilst it would have been desirable to have founded a concept of the ethical consumer on a philosophical basis, this I have concluded is not possible. At best the debate on ethics is seen as having defined issues and provided some basis for progress. Nevertheless I see competing positions: deontology, consequentialism and virtue theory, as potentially useful aids to the understanding of ethical consumers.

Although there are, thus, considerable difficulties in defining the nature of ethical consumption I have rejected subjectivist views alone as insufficient to explain a complex social phenomenon. Strictly, my interest lies in the decision making process in areas which have been socially defined as having an ethical dimension. Since market researchers as well as activists have similarly defined *ethical* issues, and relevant consumption behaviour, I may reasonably take *ethical attitudes* as those *adopted* by these overlapping discourses. This sets the scope for the present enquiry. I shall refer to behaviour within this scope as 'conventional ethical consumption' when I want to indicate specifically that I am distinguishing it from a particular subjective view or a particular discourse (e.g. in a specialist magazine).

The exception to this collectivist approach will be in my relation to those people contributing to the study. Although they will be initially guided towards conformity with the attitudes around which market researchers are attempting to construct a segment, their own views of ethical must stand because for methodological considerations it would be unproductive, and perhaps unethical, to challenge them. When I want particularly to distinguish this from 'conventional ethical consumption' I shall refer to 'subjective ethical consumption'.

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- <sup>1</sup> Durning (1992), p31.
- <sup>2</sup> See 'real' average consumer expenditure: Newholm (1999b), p177.
- <sup>3</sup> Durning (1992).
- <sup>4</sup> Wainwright (1998) in *The Guardian*.
- <sup>5</sup> Hansen & Schrader (1997), p443.
- <sup>6</sup> In line with Smith's (1990) work on ethical consumers, I shall from here on adopt the convention that 'products' may be assumed to include 'services'.
- <sup>7</sup> Heiskanen & Pantzar (1997).
- <sup>8</sup> Brown (1995).
- <sup>9</sup> Durning (1992), of course, refers to the transformation of luxuries into necessities.
- <sup>10</sup> Ollman (1998), p82 (*emphasis in the original*).
- <sup>11</sup> Campbell (1995).
- <sup>12</sup> Baudrillard (1988).
- <sup>13</sup> Hyperreality is the term Baudrillard (1988) uses for the destination of consumer culture.
- <sup>14</sup> The concept of relative poverty introduced by Townsend (1979) underpins the notions (albeit through an insistence on paid employment) of social exclusion currently informing political policy: Giddens (1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Giddens (1994).
- <sup>16</sup> Lunt & Livingstone (1992).
- <sup>17</sup> Campbell (1998).
- <sup>18</sup> Hansen & Schrader (1997), p443.
- <sup>19</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p26.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Majority World' refers to what is more commonly termed the Third World where the majority of the world's population live. It is preferred because of its less pejorative form.
- <sup>21</sup> In relation to the environment the market liberal ideology is expressed in a series of books from the Institute of Economic Affairs. I would draw particular attention to Anderson & Leal (1991).
- <sup>22</sup> Giddens (1994), p248.
- <sup>23</sup> I develop the theme of irresolvability later in the thesis.
- <sup>24</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>25</sup> NOP (1994); Gallup (1995) and; Mintel (1994).
- <sup>26</sup> Dragon Research (1995), p10.
- <sup>27</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p163.
- <sup>28</sup> Pantzar (1995).
- <sup>29</sup> Troy (1993) p107.
- <sup>30</sup> Ölander & Thøgersen (1995).
- <sup>31</sup> Jennings (1998) in *The Guardian*.
- <sup>32</sup> The long running Nestlé boycott for irresponsible promotion of powdered baby milk to Majority World countries may have become symbolic of ethical consumerism.
- <sup>33</sup> I first developed the concept of ethical consumers in a daunting decision making environment in a paper I delivered to the Hull University forum on Human Consciousness and Decision Making: Newholm (1997b). Crocker & Linden (1998) make a similar point in their introduction to *Ethics of Consumption*.
- <sup>34</sup> Simon (1955) and (1958).
- <sup>35</sup> Pantzar (1995) expounds his evolutionary theory of consumption.
- <sup>36</sup> Langrish (1993).



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- <sup>37</sup> Singer (1997), p3.
- <sup>38</sup> I am aware that behaviourists like Foxall argue that attitudes are a reflection of behaviour. I disagree, but it still follows that understanding can be gained from people's (post hoc.) philosophy.
- <sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Schlegelmilch (1994).
- <sup>40</sup> I have used Hirschman's (1979) terminology here.
- <sup>41</sup> Singer (1994), p13.
- <sup>42</sup> Hume (1740), p123.
- <sup>43</sup> Consumer 'unmanagability' is the key concept in Gabriel & Lang (1995).
- <sup>44</sup> Singer (1994), p8, *emphasis in original*.
- <sup>45</sup> Hansen & Schrader (1997).
- <sup>46</sup> Singer (1993), p177.
- <sup>47</sup> Durning (1992), p136.
- <sup>48</sup> See Meiklejohn (1998), p30.
- <sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Anderson & Leal's (1991) arguments against planned intervention.
- <sup>50</sup> O'Neill (1993).
- <sup>51</sup> Singer (1997).
- <sup>52</sup> Sidgwick (1907), p313f.
- <sup>53</sup> For example Sidgwick (1907), p315, says "... practical Utilitarian reasoning must necessarily be rough, ... [but this is] no reason for not making them as accurately as the case admits ...".
- <sup>54</sup> Wells & Jetter (1991), p26, for instance, argue in favour of global trade as ultimately of benefit to people in poor countries.
- <sup>55</sup> Norman (1998).
- <sup>56</sup> Murdoch's (1991) basis for virtue is criticised by Vaughn Thomas (1998).
- <sup>57</sup> Stitts (1992).
- <sup>58</sup> I am aware of ongoing attempts to resolve such issues e.g. Hare's (1994) Universal Prescriptivism.
- <sup>59</sup> Singer (1994), p4.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p6.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., p10.
- <sup>62</sup> Godwin (1793), p314.
- <sup>63</sup> Singer (1994), p6.
- <sup>64</sup> Singer (1986), p216.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., p228.
- <sup>66</sup> Sidgwick (1907).
- <sup>67</sup> See Midgley (1994).
- <sup>68</sup> Glover (1986).
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p126.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., p127.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., p128.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., p133.
- <sup>73</sup> Ward (1986), p1.
- <sup>74</sup> Cooper-Martin & Holbrook (1993).
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., p117.
- <sup>76</sup> Bentham (1789), p307.

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<sup>77</sup> Etzioni (1988), p11f.

<sup>78</sup> Smith cited in Singer (1995), p176.

<sup>79</sup> Lloyd (1992a), p13.

<sup>80</sup> Mintel (1994).

<sup>81</sup> HPI Research adds a cautionary note: "It is important to note when considering the proportions of each within our sample, that this is not representative of the UK consumer population as a whole. Rather, we found that a sizeable proportion of consumers declined to participate in our survey, as they were not interested in 'green' issues or perceived it to be of little importance in comparison to their own problems. Consequently we suggest that our sample is slightly biased towards those consumers who are more attitudinally predisposed towards environmental issues ..." Lloyd (1992b), p29.

<sup>82</sup> Shaw & Clarke (1999) speak of 'base concerns'.

<sup>83</sup> In conversation with a co-editor, Rob Harrison, I was told that the editors do not directly transcribe readers concerns.

<sup>84</sup> Elliott (1994).

<sup>85</sup> Burnett & Lunsford (1994).

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## 2. debating consumer capitalism

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There is a great advantage with an extra-disciplinary approach such as the one I am encouraged to take. To risk some stereotypes, I am not restricted, as some can be in business schools, to positivistic approaches (appropriate in some circumstances and at some times), encumbered by the heroic assumptions of economics, subject to the epistemological fashions of some sociology departments or experimental obsessions of psychology.

However to slip into Mark Midgley's geographical metaphor<sup>1</sup>, I stand on a slight rise to survey a patchwork landscape of relevant academic disciplines, philosophy, anthropology, politics, history etc., fragmented into fields of study some bounded neatly others undelineated. Some are clearly in view, others more obscured from my present vantage point but all flowering, Daniel Miller<sup>2</sup> assures me, with theories of consumption: ".... there has been a considerable and relatively sudden expansion of interest in the topic of consumption throughout the social sciences." The high cost of extra-disciplinarity lies in too much choice. By contrast the constrained doctoral student has dedicated bodies of literature and developing methodology to review.

Some decisions have therefore to be made. I shall use maps: Miller's review of disciplines; Gabriel & Lang's introduction to consumer perspectives; Mary Zey's collected theories of decision making and; Ölander & Thøgersen's critique of applied methodologies, all to abbreviate the discussion. Inevitably I have been selective and not referred to much that I have read.

In the first section, I shall spend time reviewing *prima facie* key themes in the culture and structure of consumer society. This section on broadly conceived consumer theory includes human competing perspectives on consumers as victims and sovereigns, conceptualisations of economic systems and the contradictions inherent in our society,

and decision making and choice. I conclude in a short second section by offering my view; the view of consumers that informs this study.

In the third section I am concerned with those fields of knowledge that have had more than most, good reason to consider the socially conscious, green and ethical consumer. Here I shall briefly review marketing and market research.

But importantly, as is not uncommon in research, I shall be looking for a view of 'the mountain' from an isolated spot; views that are rarely taken but could afford insightful understanding of ethical consumers. Accordingly I have two sections in which I set out the academic work that specifically researches consumers with ethical concerns. In section 2.4 I very briefly review those approaches that seem to me to offer less promising ways into the subject. In section 2.5 I adopt a thematic approach to relevant research and conclude by indicating an appropriate contribution for me make; my view of the mountain.

## **2.1. consumer theory**

Consumers, says Bibó Schlegelmilch, are wiser in the 1990s and have wider concerns supported by "the whole new [information] industry". He gives a gushing analysis<sup>3</sup> of how the consumer has shown s/he can influence production<sup>4</sup>:

*Three key points emerge: (1) Consumers have changed and are now much more interested in green, ethical and charitable issues. (2) Companies are well aware of these changes and are in the process of adapting not only their product offerings but also their ethical positions. (3) The new era has also begun for the [marketing] discipline itself, which is now increasingly concerned with non-traditional marketing issues. [...] Taking these collectively, it has hopefully been demonstrated that marketing is indeed facing a new era and that the green, ethical and charitable developments are not just another marketing ploy.*

Less euphorically George Brooker<sup>5</sup> argued that “[t]hese ‘socially conscious consumers’ may be the group whose actions lead the way to an improving quality of life in society”. Schlegelmilch’s *marketing* fantasy and Brooker’s *economic psychologist*’s optimism illustrate the importance of the ethical consumer to both particular disciplines and advocates of market systems. Conversely, the neo-classical concept of the *economic human* seems, for many commentators, to have brought us to the brink of ecological or social disaster. Yet if consumers can, of their own free will, choose to modify their lifestyle in such a way that they *create* markets for sustainable products then the market system will not only have triumphed over the command economies but have proved itself capable of delivering an unrivalled super-democracy of responsible sovereign consumers; none-the-worse for being a negation of the self-interested neo-classical individual<sup>6</sup>.

I would wish the above quotations to illustrate how embedded in the author’s theory of consumption is any conceptualisation of ‘the ethical consumer’. The ethical consumer, who is pivotal in Brooker’s free choosing society is of little relevance in Marcuse’s world of systematically victimised consumers. Paul Ekins’ consumer-activist, central to his new economics project, would not be able to extract herself from Baudrillard’s hyperreality. The quotations are firmly rooted in an ideology which isolates aspects of individuals for analysis and often the individual from social context. The author’s conclusions, I would argue, reflect this reduction<sup>7</sup>.

If we are to believe Durning’s dire environmental predictions or simply long for Brooker’s, utilitarian, improved ‘quality of life’ then these issues become important to humanity. Simply, none of us *really* knows the social and environmental consequences of consumer capitalism but my point is that these debates are of more than academic interest.

### **2.1.1. consumer capitalism: did we jump or were we pushed?**

Some celebrate consumption, others berate it. There is little disagreement but that in the affluent world<sup>8</sup> individual consumption of products and services is rising. The underlying

motivation for our increasing consumption, by contrast, is hotly disputed. The fundamental division is between those who would have us coerced (by an over-productive technostucture or late capitalism) into unwanted consumption and those who argue that we freely and eagerly consume more. Further divisions, of course, occur in the former concerning the manner of the coercion and the nature of 'real' and 'forced' consumption. In the latter schisms occur between conceptualisations of the consumer as an individual pursuing pleasure and social beings, free to indulge in, or constrained by socially constructed needs. Gabriel & Lang<sup>9</sup> provide a comprehensive and detailed critique of these (competing) theories. I shall return to their work after exploring some of the themes of particular importance to this study.

Most accounts in consumer theory begin noting the exceptional capacity of the contemporary productive system<sup>10</sup>. Set in juxtaposition with this we are "... faced with [the problem of explaining] the continual forward flight and unlimited renewal of needs ..."<sup>11</sup> in other words, the rising level of consumption in the affluent world. This is a central issue in consumer theory but also has clear implications for any concept of the ethical consumer. Because Baudrillard is one of the most influential writers to reject the view that we fulfil needs and he chooses John Galbraith as a worthy adversary offering a competing explanation, I shall set out and debate their positions.

Affluent people, Galbraith theorises, consume for basic needs but consume further, 'passively', in response to 'needs' created by the productive system. Thus he<sup>12</sup> says:

*The fact that wants can be synthesized by advertising, catalysed by salesmanship, and shaped by the discreet manipulations of the persuaders shows that they are not very urgent. A man (sic) who is hungry need never be told of his need for food. If he (sic) is inspired by his appetite, he (sic) is immune to the influences of [producers]. The latter are effective only with those who are so far removed from physical want that they do not already know what they want. In this state alone men (sic) are open to persuasion.*

In this close association of consumption and production "... wants depend on the process by which they are satisfied."<sup>13</sup>: the 'Dependence Effect'. Stridently, Galbraith asserts that "[i]n the absence of the contrivance the increase [in consumption] would not occur."<sup>14</sup>. The motivation for consumption, beyond modest needs, rests therefore solely with the imperatives of the productive system and its manipulative forces.

Baudrillard challenges Galbraith's thesis on two accounts. By implication he also criticises other theories that cite the coercive forces of producers as responsible for increasing consumption. First, he asks, how it will be decided what is, and is not, a legitimate want? In Baudrillard's opinion, such a division requires a 'pious' intellectual task by which those undertaking it show themselves as "alienated moralists"<sup>15</sup>. I suggest his criticism could be extended to commentators who like me try to work with *some* concept of ethical and unethical consumption. Secondly, needs are internal; if I really did not want to make a purchase, what persuasion would make me need it? "[N]eeds, by definition, cannot be created! ... and [this position] implies that people have a false relationship with their objects."<sup>16</sup>; they do not really want them.

Baudrillard proposes, or rather insists on, an alternative explanation of consumption. He seems to imply that (empirically) we, 'men (*sic*) of wealth', spend relatively, and significantly, less time interacting with our fellows and more with objects, the cultural processes surrounding their purchase and, in the widest sense, their conspicuous and festive consumption. Thus, "[t]heir daily exchange is no longer with fellows, but rather, statistically as a function of some ascending curve, with the acquisition and manipulation of goods and message ..."<sup>17</sup>. He sees this well established trend as an 'ecological mutation' which, in his later formulations, leads to the all pervasive hyperreality of the postmodern condition.

Like most postmodern theorists he argues that there is a super-abundance of objects and services with shopping malls as the "geometrical locus of affluence"<sup>18</sup>. But our engagement is not the frenzy of a newly found affluence but an ambulation of boundary-

less leisure and culture where 'Collections' are presented as 'paths' to consumption. "We have reached the point where 'consumption' has grasped the whole of life."<sup>19</sup>; thus consumption is the central determining feature in affluent societies.

Baudrillard agrees with Galbraith that it has become harder to sell than to manufacture<sup>20</sup> and this causes the productive forces to focus on the consumer. However, he does not find the explanation of over-consumption here. Instead he<sup>21</sup> argues that

*... we can advance the following sociological hypothesis: ... if we acknowledge that a need is not a need for a particular object as much as it is a 'need' for difference (the desire for social meaning), only then will we understand that satisfaction can never be fulfilled, and consequently that there can never be a definition of needs.*

He argues that "[i]n this sense, consumption is a system of meaning, like language, or like the kinship system in primitive society."<sup>22</sup> In a sophisticated argument, the relationship between desire and object is shown to be 'arbitrary'. According to Baudrillard then, we are to understand consumers (only) as active in the "... manipulation of goods and messages ..." <sup>23</sup> in the pursuit of difference; a *necessary* system of meanings.

Galbraith, who may be considered to present a moderate view of the manipulated consumer, can adequately account for consumers' misgivings but not for their apparent pleasure in consumption. Baudrillard can account for consumers futile eagerness to consume but we are forced to accept a foolish consumer whose actions are trivialised into "... an unconscious social logic"<sup>24</sup> that has led to a "... seeming inability to engage in any kind of political or moral comment"<sup>25</sup>. I agree with Peter Jackson's<sup>26</sup> argument that such a postmodern view of consumption ignores subversion, resistance, or simply other consumer interpretations. A reductionist semiotic reading leads the theorist, Jackson says, to adopt a producer viewpoint and is therefore supportive of a market liberal 'hegemony'.



Having disposed of Galbraith's concept of need, postmodern theorists are accused of concerning themselves obsessively with 'life-style' consumption. Too much concentration has been on less mundane forms of consumption Alan Warde<sup>27</sup> argues. Thus, because the theory of conspicuous consumption is totalised, we may legitimately ask what *pursuit* of difference (or lifestyle project) can be discerned in the selection of a free winter coat from among a few cast-offs at a charity stall in a day hostel for the homeless? There is ritual in such an act and definitely fixing of the meaning of poverty, but it is not the freely undertaken constructivism I encountered in the work of, say, Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood<sup>28</sup>. Baudrillard ignores difference of resources. For Warde<sup>29</sup> the ability to play with signs increases with affluence and decreases with poverty. Thus "... people play with the signs they can afford."<sup>30</sup> Sivanandan pointedly asks "... do the homeless consume cardboard boxes to signify they are homeless?"<sup>31</sup>

It is not, however, Baudrillard's contention that there is no longer poverty or that people no longer seek to use their purchases. Thus he cautions: "This is not to claim that there are no needs, or natural utilities, etc. The point is to see that consumption, as a concept specific to contemporary society, is not organised along these lines."<sup>32</sup> As a consequence sense cannot be made of consumption by any other perspective than his. Baudrillard insists that we see (affluent) humanity as engaged in the consumption of symbols in the futile attempt to construct social meaning and position. Baudrillard necessarily then "... ignores contradictory evidence ..."<sup>33</sup> The polemic between Baudrillard's postmodern reading of consumer society and the more conventional views expressed above presents itself only if we accept Baudrillard's *uncompromising* understanding of consumption.

If we are willing to accept a continuum of engagement and rejection with consumption and a degree of personal conflict about the issue, a different picture can be constructed. Such a condition of engaged awareness is described by Lunt & Livingstone<sup>34</sup>:

*The people we have talked to during this research are engaged in a debate concerning the nature of identity in consumer culture. The dynamic of debate is a natural milieu for them .... concerning tradition and modernity, freedom and determinism, opportunity and danger. Big issues played out in a domestic setting.*

Such approaches as Baudrillard's with his "... refusal to qualify or delimit his claims."<sup>35</sup> are criticised by Gabriel & Lang as 'one dimensional views' that fail to capture consumers as people. By contrast Warde<sup>36</sup>, for example, argues that we, "[c]onsumers [...] have three predominant orientations towards that which they might consume: they might be seeking use-values, exchange-values, or identity-values. It is impossible to understand modern consumerism without all three types."<sup>37</sup> Under use value an inclusive framework such as Warde's would locate Campbell's view that we (*primarily*) pursue pleasure. Similarly<sup>38</sup>, I will argue that sign-value is relevant to the (ethical) consumer and perhaps increasingly so, but it is not helpful to see its influence as the sole purpose of consumption. Its importance will vary temporally, by commodity and with many other social factors of consumption. Likewise in arguing for a view of the consumer as more actively aware, I have equally not accepted Galbraith's consumer victim. As consumers we may often be duped and persuaded but would not be so foolish as to be consumers entirely against our wills.

#### **2.1.2. from the future to the past: understandings among ethical consumers**

In as much as Baudrillard interpolates the present from the future hyper-reality<sup>39</sup>, Douglas & Isherwood seek to explain the present by delving into the past. They cite anthropological studies and invite us to see parallels with our own society<sup>40</sup>. The human project is, they argue, to fix meaning "... reducing ... disorder, and making the universe more intelligible."<sup>41</sup> Central to this is the use of objects. We fix meaning by rituals and the rituals require, as they always have, appropriate props. Although I have adopted the common position that such insights should not be totalised I want to illustrate their

importance by reference to an early meeting with another academic. My research log records:

*Apprehensively, needlessly as it turned out, I negotiated the unfamiliar university corridors in search of the appointed room. It all becomes familiar later but this was the first academic encounter of the PhD and I had little idea of the protocol. Room 2004 was small and lined, inevitably, with books and papers. Stephen was engaged in research into green product innovation which complemented my research into ethical (and green) consumers. But I guess what was at stake here was whether we understood the social significance of our concerns in a similar way. This was soon resolved by drinking coffee - fair trade coffee. Coffee drinking rituals traditionally cement good will, often having very strict protocols. In this event where we could both approve, he by offering, me by accepting and acknowledging, not just the specific issues surrounding coffee production but the whole morality implied by the concept. Little specific to this understanding was said but an approximate world view was agreed.*

I later confirmed this view of the incident with Stephen. Again however Douglas & Isherwood are inclined to overstate their insight when they say that: "Goods, then, are the visible part of culture."<sup>42</sup>.

I have wanted to illustrate both the importance and limitations of the many cultural insights into consumption practice. It is instructive here to additionally note Ben Fine & Ellen Leopold<sup>43</sup> who argue that most consumer research, as reviewed above, proposes 'horizontal' theories to explain consumption: postmodern semiotics, neo-classical individualism etc. The insights from these are generalised from the observation of some cases and not only are they inadequate to explain what is found elsewhere but are then, in spite of any value they may have, incompatible with each other. They are 'horizontal' in the sense that they are applicable *across consumption activity* but ignore capitalisation,

production and disposal of consumer products. Such insights, they argue, should not be taken out of context.

### **2.1.3. classless consumers?**

An acrimonious debate has arisen in consumer theory concerning social class such that I believe I should make a clear statement of my position. Partly as an effect of horizontal conceptualisations of consumers the notion of social class has been rendered problematic. Additionally I suggest some confusion is apparent. For an instance, Lunt & Livingstone<sup>44</sup> in their account of consumer culture argue that:

*The economic conditions which created the consumer market through modern production methods vastly increased the diversity of goods available to the consumer. This explosion of goods provides the material conditions which overwhelm traditional identities based on social class positions, allowing for a new growing individual freedom from social determinism.*

Yet by the end of the book<sup>45</sup> I read that:

*Identity and mass consumption are related through discourse, the arguments and political positions promoted by the rising lower middle class and to justify their particular tastes, resources allocation and social position. Those in the higher class positions have then to discover more exclusive products and practices, 'positional' goods, which will mark them out as different. Intellectuals oppose the spread of cultural capital by staying one step ahead of the supermarket shopper in their discovery of exotic products and practices. Thus the changes in material conditions express continuing social class divisions rather than the breakdown of structure.*

I am unclear whether Lunt & Livingstone are arguing that we have moved into an individualistic era of fragmented (and more transitory) groupings where (Marxian?) class

is no longer a relevant concept. Or are they saying we have moved into an intensified (Weberian?) class struggle played out primarily through consumption.

Whereas Baudrillard<sup>46</sup> moves from Marxism into the hyperreality of postmodernism which has dissolved all 'real' boundaries, Warde<sup>47</sup> comments that Bauman, in later work, has to accept the class based nature of lifestyle construction. Mike Featherstone<sup>48</sup> whilst arguing that consumers strive to overcome 'symbolic inflation' is prepared to delimit this insight by attempts to marry the concepts of consumption and class. Thus:

*... within consumer culture there still persists prestige economics, with scarce goods demanding considerable investment in time, money and knowledge to attain and handle appropriately. Such goods can be read and used to classify the status of their bearer.*

The classes referred to are, of course, socio-economic groups (by occupational position and consumption status group). Warde by contrast<sup>49</sup> argues that the understanding of consumption cannot be separated out from a complex interaction of *production, access* and *delivery* as well as enjoyment and/or social positioning without creating one-dimensional accounts.

Likewise I still hold to a concept of class based on a person's relationship to the capitalist system. More than once, for instance, it has been suggested to me that the people who contributed to this study are 'Middle-class'. Or indeed that the concerns they hold that underpin ethical consumption are those of 'the Middle-classes'. If that means that my contributors have, or potentially could more so, benefit materially from consumer capitalism but that they derive their income *substantially* from their labour rather than investment, then I mostly agree. In this respect their precise occupation and consumption pattern is of less importance.

Following the work of E. O. Wright<sup>50</sup>, therefore, relatively affluent consumers such as those in my study, are seen as in a 'contradictory position'. Support for consumer

capitalism is likely to be provisional upon their (and other's) continuing material and social well-being. Where I use the term class it will be in this sense.

#### **2.1.4. sovereign consumer?**

A notion of 'consumer sovereignty' is, I think, correctly indicated by Craig Smith<sup>51</sup> to be central to a consideration of ethical consumers. The origins of the theory predate its clear statement and naming but are suggested in the work of Adam Smith. However, writing in the 1940s L. E. von Mises produced perhaps the seminal and most 'provocative' accounts of consumer sovereignty. R. A. Gonso<sup>52</sup> summarises his position thus:

*The heart of his argument is that if strict laissez-faire capitalism exists, wherein the state enforces juristic laws and leaves the operation of natural laws unhampered, then consumer sovereignty will rule over all, with the rational interests of all other classes being harmonized with it in the long run. In more detail, the consumers' rational wants, as expressed by effective consumer demand in product markets, ultimately (the exact meaning of 'ultimately' being left unclear) will determine all prices; self-interested entrepreneurs, factor owners, savers and investors will voluntarily and rationally calculate and choose courses of action in the light of price facts; and so effective consumer demand will govern 'all economic phenomena' and optimally satisfy itself.*

In direct contradiction, then, of the Marxist understanding that ownership of the means of production confers effective control, in this theory consumers assume "catalytic, or indirect, power" and therefore "catalytic ownership"<sup>53</sup> over all wealth. What makes the concept attractive is that "[a]s an aggregate its effect is analogous to that of a rule by majority."<sup>54</sup> but seemingly without coercion. However, Gonso articulates what has now become a familiar critique of this highly theoretical position when he asks: "... could the notion be convincing in the face of externalities, imperfect consumer rationality, variations in the distribution of income of consumers, real costs, monopoly, mass production of standardised products, and [producers'] selling efforts?"<sup>55</sup> In quite specific

terms Lang<sup>56</sup> sets out the difficulties facing the consumer endeavouring to exert some sovereignty over their food purchases as the conditions Gense outlines intensify.

An archetypal opposing view is expressed by Fine & Leopold<sup>57</sup> thus:

*Consumer sovereignty takes as its model the perfectly competitive industry, with well informed consumers and rigidly formed or inherited preferences. Its antithesis is highly monopolised capital, with heavy dependence upon manipulative advertising and consumer ignorance.*

Leaving aside any concern with the compatibility of consumer ethics with a theory for which "[i]t is axiomatic that rational self interest rules human action"<sup>58</sup> the question of theorising consumer power remains highly contested. Nicholas Abercrombie, like many commentators argues that although ideas of absolute authority are too crude, a shift of 'authority' towards consumers has occurred. But consumers and producers are, he says, in constant conflict over authority contested in terms of expertise, deference, taboo and meaning<sup>59</sup> and these seem insightful views in respect of ethical consumers.

In his consideration of the theoretical position of ethical consumerism Smith undertakes a detailed analysis of consumer sovereignty. Having ascribed the status of ideology to the theory he says<sup>60</sup>:

*In short, consumers are not sovereign but one can refer to a degree of sovereignty, enhanced by choice, information, and possibly (though not necessarily in all cases) retailer assessment; but restricted by limitations of competition, actions by the state, and individual wealth.*

He agrees with Fine & Leopold<sup>61</sup> that "[s]ome commodities may be more subject to consumer sovereignty and some less so." This view of a circumscribed consumer power varying from one 'system of provision' to another depending on the currently prevailing factors is the one initially informing this study.

### 2.1.5. the necessity of choice?

As will be seen Smith identifies *choice* as essential to consumerism. In neo-classical economic theory the concept of choice is paramount as Enoch Powell's seminal passage<sup>62</sup> shows:

*But free enterprise is more than a piece of machinery. A society which runs its economic affairs on the principles of free enterprise will be a different kind of society from one where the economy is controlled and managed by the Government. The free enterprise economy is the true counterpart of democracy: it is the only system which gives everyone a say. Everyone who goes into a shop and chooses one article instead of another is casting a vote in the economic ballot box: with thousands or millions of others that choice is signalled through to production and investment and helps to mould the world just a tiny fraction nearer to people's desire. In this great and continuous general election of the free economy nobody, not even the poorest, is disenfranchised: we are all voting all the time.*

Note that 'the great and continuous general election' is promoted as superior to social democracy for most purposes. It is not only the political right, of course, that sees market choice as a vote. Proponents of ethical consumerism and a broad range of academics refer to the concept. Of those reviewed in this study, Baudrillard, Ekins, Monroe Friedman, and Hansen & Schrader and Wells & Jetter all employ the voting metaphor<sup>63</sup>. But there is an issue as to whether the choices made in the market are significant choices. This *seems* as Smith says fundamental to a meaningful concept of the ethical consumer. For if I may choose a light bulb, as was in the mid-1990s the case, between many brands some of which are energy saving (at significantly different prices and specifications) but *all* manufactured by producers who are deeply associated with the manufacture of weaponry<sup>64</sup>, I am casting a dubious vote. Clearly this is closely tied to issues of availability which impact on possibilities of ethical consumption.



Superficially the postmodernists and neo-classical economists satisfaction at the profusion of consumer goods seems well founded. However, Gabriel & Lang extensively review the material choice and find a mixed situation. In some areas, they conclude, choice has increased recently whereas in others it has diminished. What is more significant is their reluctance to accept what the market offers as choice. "In our view the right of individuals to make infinitesimal selections between close alternatives, important though this may be, should not override other vital human interests, priorities and rights."<sup>65</sup> They argue, convincingly, but I suspect with little real hope since the term has been so fully appropriated by marketing, that the term 'choice' should be reserved for matters of some moment. We may suppose these include concerns of ethical consumers but the matter of choice will not rest here.

#### **2.1.6. the rational informed consumer**

It has been seen from the sovereignty debate that the possession by consumers of a "... considerable but less than perfect knowledge ..." <sup>66</sup> is central to the neo-classical project. The same would appear to be true of any project promoting ethical consumption. There are, however, a number of limitations to note concerning this concept of adequate information because:

1. the reviews of public behaviour modification campaigns<sup>67</sup> conclude information does not necessarily modify behaviour;
2. the "whole new information industry" which Schlegelmilch<sup>68</sup> predicted for ethical consumers has not materialised<sup>69</sup>;
3. ".... studies show that the typical consumer gathers very little information before purchase, even for fashionable, expensive and infrequently purchased items."<sup>70</sup> and;
4. information can be swiftly changing, or inappropriate<sup>71</sup>.

This is not to argue that information is not a significant factor in consumption (it is) nor that consumers are irrational (although for instance emotional motivation may seem so<sup>73</sup>) but that the issue must be treated as problematical. As a generalist I do not have to choose between concepts of information processing and otherwise motivated consumers but as below to note the debate.

One further limitation must be presented here on the issue of information in general which will be of significance to this study. In respect of research, but equally applicable to consumer information, Warde<sup>73</sup> says "... no-one would ever require a complete account of all episodes<sup>74</sup> from the point of conception to final consumption, because it would be hopelessly detailed ..." and complex<sup>75</sup>. In contemporary society, the increasing pace of technological change can produce information overload which in the case of product innovation can result in innovation overload and consumer resistance to purchase. Overload increases with uncertainty, ambiguity, novelty, complexity and intensity. Moreover, information overload is not related to a single purchase decision but cumulative. "The user may have limits beyond which all other changes will be ignored or actively resisted."<sup>76</sup> In this context it is possible to theorise daunting circumstances for would be ethical consumers but we have little empirical evidence of how consumers proceed. Moreover there are contradictions that no additional information processing would resolve.

#### **2.1.7. contradictions in consumer capitalism**

In polemic mode, Miller<sup>77</sup> argues that there is a powerful relationship between consumers' demands and poor labour conditions. Thus we facilitate the systematic repression of (our) labour in the capitalist system:

*That the contradiction lies within and not just between nations is not true simply of the developing world. Also in the First World countries there is an increasingly common scenario in which the primary victim of capitalism and the primary beneficiary may be one and the same person: that is the housewife in her other guise as worker or unemployed.*

In Miller's conceptualisation it is our own demands for, say, longer opening hours and faster service, that condemns us to more labour or unemployment. Likewise Baudrillard<sup>78</sup> sets out an instructive contradiction in consumer capitalism:

*Traffic and the automobile provide a classic example of this contradiction, where there is the unlimited promotion of individual consumption; the desperate call to collective responsibility and social morality; and increasingly severe restraints. The paradox is the following: one can not simultaneously remind the individual that 'the level of consumption is the just measure of merit' and expect of him or her a different type of social responsibility, since in the act of personal consumption the individual already fully assumes a social responsibility. Once again, consumption is a social labour. The consumer is conscripted and mobilised as a labourer at this level as well (today perhaps just as much as at the level of 'production'). All the same, one should not ask the 'labourer of consumption' to sacrifice his (sic.) income (his individual satisfactions) for the collective good. [...]*

*The fact that resistance [to calls for restraint] and 'egoism' drives the system to insoluble contradictions, to which it responds by reinforcing restraints, only confirms that consumption is a gigantic political field, whose analysis, as well as that of production, is still to be achieved.*

With similar validity I could contrast the very significant rise in complaints about noise, tightened legislation and calls for restraint in contradiction to the production of a succession of 'music centres' each with its new technology, enhanced volume and base boost. I could counterpoise the rise of cigarette smoking among the young with the

campaigns against smoking. For the early Marxist Baudrillard, this "... revives fundamental historical problems: those concerning the ownership of the means of consumption ..." and therefore the power relationships in society. Such conceptualisations are a reminder that consumer capitalism does not provide a neutral environment within which an individual operates but is dynamic in social, moral and environmental terms.

#### **2.1.8. commodity fetishism: a problem of gross mediation?**

Such complex conditions inevitably place exceptional demands on would be ethical consumers. In all this the consumer, and very especially the ethical consumer, is in some difficulty; removed from the processes of production. Marx coined the phrase commodity fetishism to connote the process by which the consumer would be unable to understand the production process. John Lachs makes this the central point of his thesis. He notes that simple (subsistence) life has 'immediacy' of experience. The individual is "... in touch with the conditions of existence."<sup>80</sup>; a human both makes decisions and knows the consequences of those decisions. In complex societies, he notes, there is growing and 'ubiquitous' 'mediation of action' by other humans, machines, and social institutions such that "... the intermediate man (*sic.*) ..... obstructs my view of the action and of its consequences alike."<sup>81</sup>. Significantly for the present study Lachs<sup>82</sup> considers that:

*... perhaps the most serious consequence of mediated action is the psychic distance it introduces between human beings and their actions. We quickly lose sight of the conditions of our existence and forget, if we ever knew, the immediate qualities and long-range effects of our actions.*

Psychic distance is personal and, for Lachs, a non-judgmental term (unlike its close counterpart, alienation) and means that we are unable to 'appropriate' acts and assume responsibility because we do not experience them; we have a blindness to the interconnectedness. Our ignorance, Lachs proposes, is proportional to the length of the mediation chain and leads to feelings of powerlessness<sup>83</sup>.

Significantly Lachs<sup>84</sup> reflects that:

*... few of the actions that sustain or fulfil my life are performed by me. They are done for me - many without my knowledge of what they are or why they are necessary. Yet, on the other hand, these actions are also mine, and mine not only because I would have to do them or something like them, had there been no others to help out. For there is also a residual act or experience of the self that reveals the action as its own: we pay for services in kind or cash and bear, in any case, the natural consequences of what is done.*

The consumer connection is made both individually and communally. Causality and responsibility are exceptionally complex. "It is hollow to disclaim responsibility for slaughtered animals if we pay for a coat made of their skins or fur."<sup>85</sup> Whilst for Lachs, a liberal, the psychic distance is a problem for the individual, for Marx alienation is of course systemic. What is important here however is to note the exceptional difficulties encountered by the ethical consumer in consumer capitalism.

#### **2.1.9. decision making**

I have insisted on a plurality of *consumers* whose behaviour can be understood not by a totalising insight but by a complex of insights. Indeed I can recall Midgley<sup>86</sup> from her 'common sense' philosophy arguing that the successful primate would need conflicting motives in order to provide the necessarily rich range of responses for a successful evolutionary strategy and a management system to resolve those conflicts quickly into action; "... that is what you would expect ...". Perfectly rational or single minded humans are too predictable and seem a tad unlikely candidate! Furthermore it is not likely that a social animal would prosper whilst each individual made its own rational decisions on issues that were essentially repetitive; that sounds grossly inefficient. Limited calculations, 'deliberative processes', could clearly have a place in novel situations, such as new issues raised within consumer capitalism, but shortcuts, 'decision systems' or

procedures would be necessary in most circumstances. There are many contenders for such a role.

Zey<sup>87</sup> offers a valuable review of alternatives to (neo-classical) rational choice theory, adding the further condemnation to the standard critiques that to endorse instrumental rationalism may have real damaging effects. I shall outline four alternatives: Charles Camic's promotion of habit, Amitai Etzioni's normative - affective theory, Simon's bounded rationality and Robert Frank's theory of moral sentiments. I hope to show that the adoption of bounded rationality is appropriate because:

- this theory was developed in response to problems of decision making in complexity such as exhibited by ethical dilemmas;
- I am interested in what happens when we specifically do make decisions (as opposed to say routine) and;
- bounded rationality allows many other insights to be encompassed, albeit with a different emphasis.

Camic<sup>88</sup> argues that *habit*, or repeating previously adopted or acquired behaviour, had been central to sociological explanations of human motivation. However, he says, it has been lost as a factor, or down graded to a residual category, in the general move towards deliberative explanations of action so that ".... those who employ [rational choice theory] seldom concern themselves with providing a reasoned defence, or even an explicit justification, for their practice of uniformly casting human conduct into this one mould."<sup>89</sup>. This is a justifiable criticism but in my case I am of course not holding deliberation as universal. Indeed as Camic observes rational theorists will counter by coining a notion of ".... habits of obedience to rules ...."<sup>90</sup>. I would prefer to draw parallels with adaptive rationality drawing on accumulated experience and in this study for that category I tend to use the more expressive term habit.

Camici suggests that in the thinkers of the past there is "... an implicit claim for the *predominance* of the habitual element in a given pattern of action."<sup>91</sup> I am prepared to accept an important role for habit but have theorised that ethical consumers face dynamic situations and are forced to be either deliberative or systematic in their response.

Herbert Simon's bounded rationality and Amitai Etzioni's normative and affective theory, are 'opposed' in the sense that Simon sees "... almost all human behaviour has a large rational component ..." <sup>92</sup> whereas for Etzioni, normative/affective factors *exclude, load and infuse* rational decision making so that they must be seen as the major part of decision making. However Simon's use of the word rational is not "... the rational man (*sic*) of economics [who] is a maximiser, who will settle for nothing less than the best." Rationality here is: "... agreeable to reason; not absurd, preposterous, extravagant, foolish, fanciful or the like; intelligent, sensible."<sup>93</sup> It is the 'broader everyday sense of rationality'. Thus what Simon sees as the deployment of an heuristic, Etzioni sees as normative. For Simon the use of the heuristic is rational because it embodies the collective intelligence of the past which cannot be otherwise called to consciousness. For Etzioni normative/affective behaviour is often positive (not a threat to rationality) and in this case must be presumed to carry social wisdom through 'the development of judgements'. At least in some cases it is difficult to conclude other than that these are similar ways of describing decision making.

There are differences of course. Simon's decision maker is rationally (sensibly) deploying a simplifying decision making strategy whereas Etzioni's will spontaneously decide short of a struggle to deploy some reasoned and sustained thought. At times "raw emotions often do limit and interrupt reason, and socialisation of emotions may never be complete."<sup>94</sup> If raw emotions are so very pervasive, however, we are entitled to ask how Etzioni wrote his chapter: 'Towards a new decision making model'? Surely his writing was the result of considerable *deliberation* on his part and therefore rational choice has a very significant contribution to make.

In 'A Theory of Moral Sentiments' Robert<sup>95</sup> proposes a 'commitment model' of human action. Because the "ruthless pursuit of self-interest [he argues] is often self-defeating"<sup>96</sup> it is incapable of explaining why people are moral when there is no apparent personal gain, say, because the situation is not to be repeated and/or there is no way of censuring selfish action<sup>97</sup>. He proposes a theory where moral sentiments are favoured because in social circumstances they are beneficial. Thus if someone can be *recognised* as trustworthy they will (unintentionally) benefit materially from the relationships that are then possible. Consistent behaviour is imperative. Moral sentiments, he says, are both innate motivations and actively cultivated and the theory is necessarily of individuals engaged in society rather than a micro-theory.

Such a theory seems to me to offer significant opportunities for the study of ethical consumers and especially in understanding their isolated moments. However Roberts inclusion of *cultivated* morality requires exponents to deliberate on the complexities of ethical consumerism. How else could they be sure to maintain coherence of project?

Because I do not intend to argue that my theoretical position is in any way exclusive, I have tried to show the importance of bounded rationality in this instance but accept the value of other perspectives. I will develop the use of bounded rationality in the subsequent chapters.

## **2.2. *reconstructing the consumer***

My concern here is to (re)construct a theory of consumption that will inform this study. I have criticised reductionism; from my review so far it is clear that I wish to include insights rather than examine the niceties and privilege one. My review will necessarily seem eclectic but I make few apologies. Additionally I wish to adopt a view of the 'consumer' from which I do not need to exclude myself. I do this in relation to three questions about our motivation and how we should be understood.



### 2.2.1. why consume?

We consume for use. Increasingly, we consume for value, for pleasure<sup>98</sup> and, importantly, to differentiate and locate ourselves in our social interactions. I see no necessary imperative for privileging a motive. What is particularly important for this study is that what results, our actions, are seen as contingent upon inner tensions and debates. Therefore those actions cannot be meaningfully detached from the political and economic environment in which we live<sup>99</sup>.

I need not ascribe 'demonic powers' to advertising in order to argue that it is within this tension between personal desires and social responsibilities that producer persuasion is effective. The value of, say, a social differentiation, may be accentuated by advertising. This may be seen as affecting the balance of the internal and external imperatives. Such argument requires an example and in this case it is from my own experience:

*I have a compact disc 'music system'. It is not a Diderot set<sup>100</sup> since I have been a little frugal and replaced only failed components; no two components now match. There are features of newer equipment which appeal to me, multi-play discs, remote control, enhanced music quality (I had been impressed when I changed from tape to disc). There is a tension between these 'wants' and many other issues. I want to see this equipment as adequate to requirements, pleasure from the music I have selected, radio listening etc. I don't want to feel I am being manipulated by advertising and it is all part of consumerism which I fear is playing havoc with our environment. On balance I am not going to replace my present equipment but I could be open to persuasion.*

I do not have to resort to Galbraith's 'creation' of needs or Marcuse's bleak oppressed consumers to propose that advertising could affect this balance both directly in persuading me to "... choose what is being produced today and to 'unchoose' that which was being produced yesterday."<sup>101</sup> and indirectly through fears of on social inadequacy. Outdated, though not antiquated or 'revisited', audio equipment may be seen as

connoting lack of success (poverty), poor music taste and/or cultural ineptitude? In this formulation needs are not created by advertising but balances of consideration are tilted in favour of (not unwanted) consumption. To presume otherwise is to assume a patronising position *vis-a-vie* consumers<sup>102</sup>.

### 2.2.2. what are we consumers like?

Individualism as a philosophical project does great service in terms of human rights but is singularly unhelpful in understanding the human condition. "While it is possible to think abstractly about individuals apart from a community, if individuals were actually without community they would have very few of the attributes commonly associated with the notion of an individual person."<sup>103</sup> Thus ".... individuals are neither the simple depositories of their society's values nor free agents ..."<sup>104</sup> Etzioni argues that "... individuals experience perpetual inner tension generated by conflicts among their basic urges (or desires), among their various moral commitments, and between their urges and their moral commitments."<sup>105</sup> Such theorising finds remarkable echoes in Lunt & Livingstone's empirical work.

Whilst I have criticised Lunt & Livingstone for their failure to adequately consider capital and production [0] in their cultural pursuit of the consumer, their empirical approach provides the richest picture of the consumer<sup>106</sup> I have as yet read. They<sup>107</sup> have good grounds for concluding:

*.... that people do regard recent times as characterised by an overwhelming diversity of goods, and new and exciting possibilities of involvement in consumer culture. At the same time, we have seen that people do have a sense of loss of the old life and loss of continuity with the present and the future.*

Moreover, "[p]eople are continually guided by moral and social issues in their economic choices .... and the relation between everyday economic activity and broader social concerns."<sup>108</sup> Following a common theme Lunt & Livingstone<sup>109</sup> note that we have moved from modernism where experts in fragmented specialisms informed society, to

postmodernism where individuals are themselves responsible. Thus "... the individual may be given more and more responsibility without the resources or power to act effectively."<sup>110</sup>. Moreover, "... personal identities are ... complex and shifting ...: that people are capable of 'holding down' multiple, apparently contradictory identities at any given time as the context changes."<sup>111</sup>.

However, such a social being leads Gabriel & Lang<sup>112</sup> to develop a central theme of unmanageability in their analysis of contemporary British consumption. They point to the fragility of the position of those in a contradictory class position and argue that, in current conditions, their consumption patterns are likely to be spasmodic and unpredictable. This argument is consistent with the foregoing and clearly not without significance for the concept of the ethical consumer.

### **2.2.3. in what market relationships?**

Thus I am expecting to research complex situations about which consumers are likely to have genuine concerns. Jackson<sup>113</sup> notes that most theories of consumption tend to collapse the political (or economic) into the cultural or *vice versa*. Conversely, he argues, we can explain consumption both by seeking causation in production *and* recognising cultural meaning. By recognising a 'cultural politics', he resists reductionism.

In what may be seen as within Jackson's 'cultural politics', Fine & Leopold<sup>114</sup> advocate the analysis of 'systems of provision'. Here 'vertical' analysis reveals the capital, production and consumption factors which effect changes. They very effectively illustrate the value of this vertical approach in the food and clothing sectors. A similar approach is recommended by Warde<sup>115</sup>. He considers 'episodes of production and consumption' where commodities will pass through stages that have distinct modes of delivery with different characteristics. 'To the extent that we change the focus of analysis from the quality of the final product to the process of its provisioning we permit ourselves new perspectives on production/consumption cycles.'<sup>116</sup>.

In such market situations consumers are neither sovereign nor powerless. They may exit from regularly purchasing particular products and voice their opinion with *varying* degrees of success. I shall argue that Albert Hirschman<sup>117</sup> in his seminal work, 'Exit, Voice and Loyalty', has provided an appropriate market framework for the consideration of ethical consumers. In chapter nine I shall outline, develop and justify my use of his work. The approaches outlined in this section have in common that they argue in favour of widened perspectives on consumption. I have tried to deal similarly with motivation, decision making and context.

#### **2.2.4. reconstituting consumers in the market**

To summarise, I have argued for, not *a* consumer, but a society of people with aspirations, many, perhaps two thirds<sup>118</sup>, relatively affluent, and more engaged in consumption than at any previous time. We are engaged in the pursuit of need, pleasure and a highly debated, social life(-style) project which certainly includes differentiation and some ritual. As consumers we are susceptible to the insistent approaches of (profit oriented) producers but perfectly likely to be rebellious when morally or immorally dissatisfied; all the more unpredictable when located in uncertain and changing circumstances. These are consumers acting, not monolithically over great swathes of commodities but differentially and possibly inconsistently. We (the consumers) are people deeply imbedded in, and not understandable isolated from, our society, its opportunities, restrictions and economic system. The study of such complexity has been the subject of much theoretical abstraction and now requires empirical work<sup>119</sup>.

#### **2.3. *the business of identifying the 'ethical consumer': threats and opportunities***

It may seem strange that, having been so critical of reductionism, I now turn to a review of market research. My point has not at all been that extensive research has no place but that we have placed too much reliance on its findings. My view of the value and limitations will become clear.

In a review of 'new' consumer concerns Dragon International acknowledges that "Environmental issues have grown from fringe radicalism to become one of the most important marketing issues."<sup>120</sup>. The marketing discipline of course has a concern with the potentially higher profits to be made in niche markets. The Dragon review ventures the opinion that " ... corporate reputation will become an important means of achieving product differentiation"<sup>121</sup> or conversely, we might suggest, a company's downfall. Contemporary changes in buying patterns and popular demonstrations have convinced most commercial interests that the green and ethical 'market' is no longer peripheral. Recently, for instance, actions by 'ordinary people' in demonstrations against live animal exports have coincided with changes in patterns of food consumption. Likewise motorists (mostly in Germany) backed the Greenpeace action against Shell's disposal of an oil rig at sea by boycotting the company's petrol.

Accordingly, this section looks at some of the market research carried out during the 1980/90s by commercial organisations that have been concerned to chart the rise of green and, more recently, ethical consumerism.

### **2.3.1. surveying the rise**

With the exception of the Dragon International<sup>122</sup> and HPI Research Group<sup>123</sup> focus group reports, the research reviewed here is by extensive questionnaire using closed questions and/or statement selection. Mintel and MORI, for instance, claimed balanced samples of ≈1,000 and 2,000 respectively for their home administered questionnaire. Whereas Mintel carry out a specific survey on consumer attitudes towards green and ethical issues and purchasing behaviour, MORI and NOP insert questions into their general market research for specific corporate and non-governmental organisation (NGO) clients.

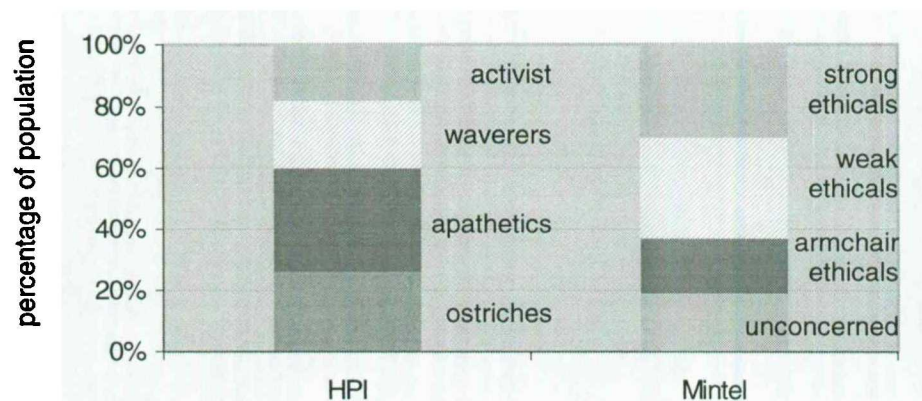
### **2.3.2. happening upon ethical consumers**

"The [Cooperative Bank's] survey produced a customer profile to make any marketing department drool. Those concerned with ethical banking were primarily in the professional classes, [and] under 45 ...."<sup>124</sup>. The commercial research, Mintel for instance,

tends to confirm the modal ethical consumer as from socio-economic groups A,B,C1 and in the age range 15-34. They are more likely to live in London and the south of Britain. Slightly more women than men will be ethical consumers although their concerns may be different.

Commercial market researchers tend to stereotype 'customers' into segments and are developing different hierarchical categories to present their findings:

*Figure 2.1 consumer segments*



In Figure 2.1 HPI data are from 1992. Mintel's are interpolated between their 1990 and 1994 figures and are based on a mixture of attitudinal and behavioural measures. In terms of assessing the significance of the phenomenon such research is important.

### **2.3.3. opportunities: trends in ethical demand**

The first commercial market research into green consumerism I have located was carried out by MORI in 1988 followed by Mintel a year later. Mintel reported a significant willingness among consumers to be affected in their buying patterns by environmental issues. In 1991 a much more comprehensive survey was carried out widening the scope of interest to include a range of ethical issues. Its title, 'The Green Consumer: Green today: ethical tomorrow', set the tone. The report suggested, not unexpectedly by then, that 59% of consumers would be affected by environmental issues. The more striking finding at the time was that 47% reported being affected by a wide range of ethical issues: oppressive

regimes, human rights, labour relations, land rights, environment, irresponsible marketing, fair trade, nuclear power, armaments, animal testing, factory farming, and political donations. Commercial interests had found the ethical consumer.

It was not until 1994 that the subsequent study showed that the reported interest in ethical issues had, in fact, not waned as thought likely during the recession. The MORI surveys<sup>125</sup> carried out annually offer results from one very broadly inclusive question in relation to purchase choices which were made on some environmental ground (Table 2.1). Its value is in the consistency of the question over time and it is the only extensive longitudinal study in this area I have found. Although the trend of the comparable figures for 1990 and 1994 seem to be in the other direction, down, a conclusion not too dissimilar overall to Mintel is drawn. A rise of green consumerism occurred up to 1990 followed by a slight but not significant fall and a stabilisation of the niche.

*Table 2.1 willingness to buy ethical products*

QUESTION: *Which if any of the following things have you done in the last year or two?*  
Selected one product over another because of its environmental friendly packaging, formulation or advertising (green consumer):

<i>year</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1995</i>
<i>% positive response</i>	19	47	50	49	40	44	40	41

What apparently had changed, according to Mintel<sup>126</sup>, and this was of course of importance to commercial interests, was that there had been a shift away from being unconcerned about ethical issues towards concerned inaction of the so called 'armchair ethical'. The change had occurred, of course, with little overall increase in demand for 'ethical' goods but it seemed the 'latent demand' had risen significantly.

Similar findings of unexpectedly high consumer concern on an apparently widening range of social issues were reported by other leading market researchers. The 1995 Gallup<sup>127</sup> survey for the Cooperative Wholesale Society, by far the largest survey with approximately 30,000 members canvassed, reported in descending order of importance

animal welfare, the environment, ease of access and packaging and labelling as of concern to most consumers. In the rush to find ethical consumers, one study found consumers favoured cooperative businesses<sup>128</sup>. But reflecting the 'traditional' ego-ethical focus of the discipline Dragon International<sup>129</sup> concluded that "[e]nvironmental performance matters to consumers so long as they do not have to compromise significantly on product performance or price."

#### **2.3.4. threats of 'negative action': the boycott**

Dragon International<sup>130</sup> found that "[m]ost people said that they were more likely to favour the products of companies of which they approved than to boycott those of which they disapproved", especially where they considered the product essential. In apparent contrast, Gallup<sup>131</sup> found "[c]ustomers ready and willing to penalise retailers and products which fail to meet their ethical standards and reward those who do." Based on answers to questions about previous involvement in boycotts and future intentions, Gallup argue that consumers will be more willing to take negative action. However, MORI<sup>132</sup> found a mere 22% of their respondents had "avoid[ed] using the services or products of a company which [they] consider[ed] has a poor environmental record". More in line with Gallup, the Mintel<sup>133</sup> research reported a much greater willingness to take negative action but suggests that whilst the willingness to buy ethical (and green) products has marginally risen the reported willingness to avoid products has fallen significantly: much confusion at the superficial level!

#### **2.3.5. information and confusion**

Both Dragon, in its in-depth groups, and Gallup, with its extensive survey, found a significant demand among consumers for more product information concerning a range of ethical issues. Likewise MORI<sup>134</sup> found 76% of consumers were interested in an official eco-labelling programme. However, it is not necessarily clear that there is an uncomplicated relationship between the availability of information and the level of



ethical demand and purchases. There are those academics<sup>135</sup>, however, who strongly argue that information overload leads to confusion and inaction.

Certainly there is evidence in the Mintel report to support the notion that many ethical consumers are presently misinformed. When given a list of current environmental issues and a list of common consumer items, a significant proportion of respondents reported making purchasing decisions upon spurious factors. Some, for instance, reported buying "CFC free washing powder"<sup>136</sup>.

The 1990s have been characterised by the proliferation of corporate, sectoral, independent, national governmental, multinational and international schemes to give consumers environmental and ethical information. Many, beset with difficulties have yet to materialise. However, Mintel's self-report on confusion about environmentally friendly claims indicates that, excluding the elderly and lower socio-economic groups, consumers are becoming more confident in their 'ethical' judgement.

*Table 2.2 confused by environmentally friendly claims*

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
<b>ALL RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES</b>			
dark green	57%	41%	3%
pale green	54%	43%	3%
armchair greens	53%	39%	8%
unconcerned	55%	37%	8%
<b>ETHICAL ISSUES</b>			
strongly ethical	55%	43%	2%
slightly ethical	57%	41%	3%
armchair ethical	51%	43%	6%
unconcerned	62%	29%	9%

Interestingly Mintel<sup>137</sup> found no correlation between reported confusion about

environmental claims and the degree of self-reported green and ethical consumption (Table 2.2).

Although there are clearly issues relating to the value of self-reported confusion studies, this work by Mintel may to some extent challenge the theory that confusion about ethical issues leads to inaction. The question remains open as to whether more, simpler and more

clearly presented product information would necessarily facilitate ethical decision making in purchasing.

### **2.3.6. the media and consumers' concerns**

Clearly the later Gallup finding would be consistent with a theory that customer concerns closely follow media coverage of particular issues. It would be important to look at the prominent issues when the research was being conducted. Whilst the Gallup survey was being carried out the headlines were about the issue of live animal export which may account for animal welfare displacing environmental issues.

### **2.3.7. assessing the contribution of market research**

The quality of market research design is variable. Respondents, for instance, to the NOP Omnibus Survey<sup>138</sup> were asked to rank their response to what I consider to be the 'leading' and 'double'<sup>139</sup> statement:

*I think the government should have greater control over the activities of big international companies to prevent them from exploiting people in the Third World.*

An ardent nationalist, in the absence of a more suitable statement, and who believed that governments should have greater control over the activities of big international companies but not necessarily to prevent them from exploiting people in the 'Third World' would be in danger of misrepresenting themselves. More problematical still, the statement, which elicited 79% agreement and 61% strong agreement, is leading because of its use of emotive language. Would many be able to admit to indifference to *exploitation* of people living in the Majority World<sup>140</sup>? Additionally there must be difficulties with the interpretation of the questions. Mintel<sup>141</sup> for instance asks consumers to respond to statements like: "I always buy / use ethical products." In the absence of an opportunity to clarify the point subjective views of 'ethical' here are very vague. It is probable that few records of refusal rates were kept although a 'sizeable proportion'<sup>142</sup> of people approached

declined. Non-response can significantly affect positivistic research as the 1992 general election polling demonstrated<sup>143</sup>.

Although the figures produced by the commercial market researchers must be treated with considerable caution, they do represent a valuable source of information because of their extensive and occasionally longitudinal nature. It seems reasonable to conclude that the commercial reports will considerably overestimate the quantity but underestimate the growth of ethical purchases over the period of the review. This is because the broad catch-all categories employed will not register individuals' increases in ethical purchase behaviour simply any moves between categories, say 'weak ethicals' to 'strong ethicals'.

They may not directly give a guide to the importance of the ethical consumer as a player in any democratisation of the market because they are not adjusted for the proportionally greater buying power of groups A, B and C1. I feel, however, able to accept the Mintel<sup>144</sup> conclusion that: "In many respects .... the market for environmentally friendly and ethical goods is maturing and that such issues are becoming firmly established as mainstream.'

As significant as quantifying the ethical consumer is, as far as possible, to characterise them. In this respect the Dragon in-depth study<sup>145</sup> may come the nearest:

*Consumers are concerned and feel threatened by an ever widening array of social and environmental problems. They often feel powerless to act and are therefore attracted to products that are 'doing their bit', or making a difference - without having to make too much of a sacrifice.*

More emphatically I am willing to accept that<sup>146</sup>:

*There has been an increase among all demographic sub-groups in the percentage of consumers who [report they] are concerned about ethical issues but are either unwilling, or do not see the need, to change their spending habits accordingly. It may be worthwhile for interested manufacturers and retailers [and PhD students] to conduct further research among such consumers to find out what is preventing them from taking action on their [reported] beliefs.*

## **2.4. academic studies of the ethical consumer: reductionism**

There are a considerable number of studies of the green or environmentally conscious consumer, some parallel studies covering such areas as health and food but very few specifically regarding ethical consumers<sup>147</sup>. Although I shall draw therefore on research from other affluent countries, the USA and Scandinavia, I intend this review to be primarily in relation to Britain. Whilst there are differences of ethical concerns say between America and Europe and strength of public attitude between Britain and Europe the substantial similarities are sufficient to generalise insights.

### **2.4.1. the problems of decontextualised research**

The business studies field has reported a stream of research on socially conscious consumers<sup>148</sup>. Caralyn Strong's is typical of these. Her work is based on consumer and retailer questionnaires and secondary data about membership of campaign organisations and the market for fairly traded goods. She finds that consumers have become more caring and aware of the ethical issues in recent years, there is a wider availability of fairly traded goods and increasingly corporations act responsibly<sup>149</sup>. Strong gives an interesting review, and to be fair she emphasises the exploratory nature of her work. But two assumptions she makes may illustrate the difficulties with such extensive research.

To conclude from an attitude and behaviour survey that consumers are becoming more caring is a grand assumption. They may be better understood as highly fragmented,

caring in very varying ways, and no more caring or less caring but in new ways demanded of them, say, by continual commodification.

Similarly referring to the Body Shop's trade policy she says: "This is a policy The Body Shop's customers certainly agree with, as sales of £500 million in 1994 illustrate ...."<sup>150</sup>. I suspect very few customers know the policy, certainly not in any detail whilst some will support the shop for other (perhaps misguided) reasons. We should not presume from insufficient data.

The difficulty with this and similar research is that consumers are aggregated, as is the practice in economics, within assumed categories to fit the fragmentary evidence. There are, as Miller says, few empirical studies of actual people and their consumer practice.

What Strong seems to miss but others have made much of is the apparent discrepancy between the strong and widening social concern expressed by consumers to market researchers and the growing but very small niche ethical product market. Observations such as this have led to a significant debate among those looking to change consumption habits. This so called words / deeds inconsistency, to which I referred in the introduction, haunts much of the research that follows.

There have been many broadly scientific approaches : psychoanalytical, behavioural and cognitive. I shall illustrate these with examples to indicate the limitations of positivistic approaches.

#### **2.4.2. psychoanalytical, behaviourist and cognitive approaches**

From Brooker<sup>151</sup> we learn that "... individuals who are higher on the dimension of self-actualization will appear more often among socially conscious consumers than will those whose self-actualization level is lower." This is, according to Brooker, because the more psychologically healthy are more likely to be able to take a long term social view. The key, to complete analysis, lies in early socialisation and exposure to environmental knowledge<sup>152</sup>.

Psychoanalytical approaches locate the 'problem' and 'solution' in the individuals who are consuming 'incorrectly' or 'correctly'. By generally ignoring the social context of consumption and production they construct simplistic attributes which effectively divide people arbitrarily. Accordingly Thøgersen & Ölander conclude from their review of personality research that ".... the results are not very stable"<sup>153</sup>.

The consumer, argues Gordon Foxall<sup>154</sup> from a behaviourist perspective, will buy green, or presumably 'ethical' products, when the benefits obtainable from buying other products are equalled or surpassed. Although Foxall finds evidence of attitudes following behaviour<sup>155</sup> his concentration is on measurable behaviour in a specified environment. As a scientist, he concerns himself with the observable; the mind is a 'black box'.

His empirical study will not be ignored since behaviour is important. However, this basic behaviourist premise is inherently contestable<sup>156</sup>. His theory cannot account therefore for the great variety of situational, social and individual responses. We are, for example, to understand those who choose qualitatively inferior products on environmental or ethical grounds as being rewarded, in equal or greater degree, by the approbation of others. Of course self-interest is an important element but it does not account for isolated individualistic events. As Robert [0] points out, we need to be able to explain why people are moral when there is no apparent personal or social gain.

Etzioni articulates a common theoretical argument against behaviourism that our behaviour is part environmentally, part internally driven. He estimates a 60/40 split. Is this internal motivation, he asks rhetorically, simply the result of prior rewards and punishment; no he retorts because the values are generalised. Thus, although internalised values account for the smaller part of behaviour and are changeable<sup>157</sup> they should not be ignored. If this is so, can we therefore model this cognitive process?

Attempts to model the cognitive processes, however, confront a central problem which is that simplicity has to be sacrificed in the pursuit of reality. The most popular model is

Icek Ajzen's & Martin Fishbein theory of reasoned action. Cognitive approaches seek to incorporate the factors affecting decision making: attitudes, beliefs, social constraints, habits, opportunity etc. Deirdre Shaw is, for instance, employing the revised theory of planned behaviour to examine consumers' ethical concern. Ajzen & Fishbein however make no specific provision for conflicting altruistic and egoistic motives<sup>158</sup> and this I think is an unwarranted simplification.

As Thøgersen & Ölander suggest such models offer the possibility of reducing the words / deeds inconsistency by including contextual constraints on voluntaristic action. Models such as Sabine Dembkoski & Stuart Hanmer-Lloyd's *Environmental Value-Attitude-System*<sup>159</sup> take a different approach to the same problem by supposing different levels of consciousness and linking these to external stimuli. Thus, they speak of 'global values' at the general level, 'domain specific values' and, at the point of intention towards specific behaviour, 'evaluation of product attributes'. Whilst generalised beliefs are "enduring beliefs concerning desired status of existence or modes of behaviour"<sup>160</sup>, at each stage of increasing specificity, *more perceptions* mediate the individual's intention. Such concretisation of situations in which decisions are made improves predictability.

However, all of these models are predicated on deliberative decision making; the conscious weighing of perceptions. Whilst I have supposed that some decision making may be understood in this way I would not wish to adopt such a restrictive approach. A further point about these market orientated studies is that they tend to aggregate isolated purchase events as in Dembkoski & Hanmer-Lloyd's<sup>161</sup> 'evaluation of product attributes'. Multiple rational events thus form an overall concept which is *only* the sum of its parts.

## **2.5. academic studies of the ethical consumer: insights and themes**

In the following section I review studies which, while in themselves do not offer complete explanations, provide themes which will be developed further in the study. Again the

sub-sections should not be taken as exclusive, they are simply concerned with organising the material.

### **2.5.1. the informed and misinformed**

A key theme in consumption and the environment is consumer knowledge. In a study looking at the influence of nutritional issues on consumer choice of foodstuffs it was concluded that there had been a rise in awareness of health and food issues<sup>162</sup>. However, the study<sup>163</sup> found confusion among consumers.

*Very few people [in the group discussions] understood what an E-number signified, although almost all were aware of their presence and a large proportion cited the presence of 'lots of numbers' as a deterrent to purchase. The group discussions revealed that few could give any specific reason for such avoidance although several referred to hyper-activity in children.*

This finds echoes in consumer reports of purchases of CFC free washing powder found by market researchers [0]. Stephen Fallows & Heather Gosden<sup>164</sup> concluded that *consumers act on generalised concepts* gained largely from the media.

Anne Keane & Anna Willetts<sup>165</sup> classic study of vegetarianism revealed similar confusion. They argue that vegetarianism was in the mid-1990s still seen as an extreme diet without official or establishment sanction, but it is associated with moral issues such as the environment and feminism and often a moral repulsion against eating flesh. Most in their sample were motivated to 'vegetarianism' because of the perception that it would be good for their health. Here they found the highest confusion level over the definition of terms. Many were quite simply not vegetarian although they thought they were.

In spite of this well documented confusion, as Jackie Burgess, Carolyn Harrison & Petra Filius report<sup>166</sup>, some consumers develop political analyses of the contradictions in consumer capitalism every bit as clear as Baudrillard:



*Government and car manufacturers profit from increasing car usage, and people believe this financial gain probably inhibits the development of alternative methods of transport. As Hannah said: The Netherlands has got its shares in Shell I believe. And look if we all leave our cars, which is a good idea in itself, then we'll be presented with the bill one way or another.*

To cast the consumer primarily as ill informed and unable to reason their situation is not, I would suggest, helpful. To illustrate my point the argument may be reversed. Public perception of environmental problems, says Troy<sup>167</sup>, for example, may be flawed as they do not accord with the results of product life cycle analysis. Indeed so, but Dembkoski & Hanmer-Lloyd<sup>168</sup> cite the purchase of new cars with water based paint and catalytic converters as an example of environmentally-conscious behaviour. There are clear contradictions here since the environmental problem with cars is rarely seen as situated in their external finish nor resolved by minor technical improvements. Lifestyle analysis would at least include materials, pollution, fuels and energy use in the broadest sense. My point is that the issues are perhaps no less confusing to researchers than consumers.

Like much of the business research, Burgess *et al.*, in a more intensive study, find that people are confused. Contradictory information, from producers, government and independent sources leads to mistrust<sup>169</sup>, and from confusion they say to inaction<sup>170</sup>. What is not clear is how the confusion leads to inaction and I suggest this is an assumption.

Ethical consumers, who at least to some extent act on their attitudes, report themselves to be no less confused than so called 'armchair ethicals'<sup>171</sup>.

The main aims set for Burgess *et al.*'s<sup>172</sup> research programme include to:

*... discover how increased public understanding of the need for more sustainable development policies and practices might best be achieved [and] recommend ways in which communication strategies and environmental education programmes ... might contribute to raising environmental awareness and understanding. It is through the latter that more environmentally conscious strategies and practices at household level are likely to be achieved.*

The 'solution', and I am here doing some injustice by simplifying the conclusion, is seen in refining education to dispel public confusion. However, not least because information from 'independent sources' must not be considered neutral<sup>173</sup>, it is questionable whether this is likely to reduce confusion and *cause* action. Empirically we may doubt this<sup>174</sup>.

*It would be pleasant to think that all we need to do is to increase an awareness of our environmental [and other ethical] problems, but bitter experience tells us against this. Although reason clarifies the alternatives, it cannot lead to someone taking a particular course of action unless he or she wants to.*

There is perhaps in this research an assumption that there are clear scientifically based guidelines to which the public may be referred. However, because all circumstances cannot be known it may be preferable to speak of 'risk' or uncertainty. This is also the term used to refer to social 'risk' consumers take in associating themselves with ethical and green products. Foxall<sup>175</sup> says that for consumers the green strategy courts high risk. It may or may not be rewarding in terms of social approbation. Hazel Suchard & Rakesh Aghawal<sup>176</sup>, from an opposing cognitive view, draw from their previous work which suggested that green consumption behaviour is related to environmental consciousness within a subjective assessment of the changing norms of society. Consumers, they say, assess perceived risks of a purchase within this context.

Developing this approach Suchard & Aghawal<sup>177</sup> looked at perceived risk for 'environmentally safe[r] products' as against the perceived risk for 'normal products'.

Perhaps surprisingly they concluded that overall the former are perceived as involving less risk. Their work is positivistic and statistically analysed, it assumes rational shopping behaviour (weighing the issues and coming to a decision) and identifies seven forms of perceived risk. These are identified as social, financial, physical, functional, psychological, time and environmental. Interestingly, they conclude that “[t]he time involved in purchasing the environmentally safe[r] product is no different from the time involved in purchasing the normal product.”<sup>178</sup>. They argue that the physical attribute of a product is most important whereas global environmental risk is least important. However, there is an apparent disagreement here. Foxall’s theoretical assertion of a high risk of social disapproval in the purchase of pro-environmental products is contrary to Suchard & Aghawal’s empirical finding of perceived low social risk.

Important here may be the concept of learned behaviour. Although some people will determinedly resist social pressure (take risk) there is undoubtedly a process where pro-environmental actions are rewarded, or otherwise, which can be seen as a slow learning process<sup>179</sup>. This theme contributes to an understanding of the social context and potentially a time lag between the development of an attitude and apparent consistent behaviour (or *vice versa* as Foxall would insist).

The notion of risk also encapsulates well the problem of the unknown, the mediated or inconceivable. A number of liberal writers have grappled with this issue. John Carroll<sup>180</sup> for instance says:

*It has been suggested that a fundamental reason why our society cannot grapple with and overcome so many of its basic environmental and social problems and bring about a needed level of change which is greater than mere cosmetic change is our collective failure to envision the future without such problems, a future more desirable than the one we all too often fear will be our legacy. We have a visioning problem, for if we cannot see, if we cannot envision such a future, then such a future will always remain beyond our grasp, and the problem will only worsen.*

He goes on to recommend a method (incongruously this involves a car) of achieving consensus about the value of actual "... places, settings, situations, locales and the ecosystems and cultural patterns upon which they are based ..." <sup>181</sup> which can serve as 'composite paradises' to aid our vision. The important question here, which will be developed, is that we may be unable to envision consumption along ethical lines. Indeed, if we expressed preferences more in line with our concept of society as an end-state than with our immediate needs hierarchy <sup>182</sup> but we are unable to envision that state, the problem becomes acute. Where such problems are obscured in consumer capitalism, consumers and researchers may understandably seem confused. Conflicting calls for more 'factual information' but also 'less cocksure information' and 'more incentives' <sup>183</sup> vie for attention.

### **2.5.2. systems of provision and consumption**

In contrast to much of the above research that isolates consumer decisions and/or practices, Pantzar recommends the application of a systems approach to consumption. He demonstrates the progressive differentiation and specialisation of products, producers and consumers. Such specialising systems and processes become inter-dependent and developments irreversible. The importance of housing and retailer locations, working and transport practices are both a function of considerable differentiation and lifestyle. The purchase of particular products cannot be understood without reference to the integrating processes of consumers' lives and producers' practices. Although regrettably little work seems to have developed this approach some interesting conclusions can be drawn from studies of producer, retailer, consumer relationships.

Following closely from Foxall's determinism, A. Simintiras, Bibo Schlegelmilch & Adamantios Diamantopoulos <sup>184</sup> offer a standard marketing discipline approach. They conclude:

*Marketing managers who wish to focus on the needs of green consumers must develop a marketing mix which accurately matches [consumers] expectations. The likelihood of developing a successful green marketing mix increases with additional information and knowledge.*

However, they introduce an important counterbalance to any alternative over-emphasis of the profit motive when they outline pro-environment pressures affecting producers<sup>185</sup>. Of course they cite regulation but also environmentally active shareholders, competitors initiatives, pressure groups, employees and executives themselves especially in response to family pressures. This is not to render ineffectual the profit motive as a structural element either in damaging or promoting the environment but to recognise present ethical pressure. Not unexpectedly, and as an empirical caution here, Stephen Cotgrove & Andrew Duff<sup>186</sup> found people in business less likely to hold what they termed 'post-material values'. However, supporting Simintiras *et al*'s<sup>187</sup> point, it could be noted that one factor in the success of the Co-operative Bank's ethical policy was the enthusiasm with which the employees took it up. What Simintiras *et al.* draw attention to is the systematic linking of the elements of provision and consumption and the complexity of interconnection.

As I have shown many commentators have pointed to the rising importance of the consumer / retailer relationship within this dynamic process. Veronica Wong, William Turner & Paul Stoneman<sup>188</sup> offer a significant production side review of the failure of green products to reach their theoretical potential through consumers' 'attitude-behaviour gap' or 'words-deeds inconsistency'. They recognise the need for any full understanding of green consumption to draw on a broad analysis of production, retail and consumption, all within the context of current legislation. However, they focus their attention on the retailing.

Unlike many studies, they<sup>189</sup> differentiate between commodities as in the case of household detergents and paper products:

*In the household detergents sector, the introduction of early green brands - Ark and Ecover - in 1986 led to the creation of the 'radical green' detergent segment. This was clearly differentiated from the main market, which had addressed green requirements in different ways - mainly the introduction of micro-powders, refillers and packaging innovations. [...] Furthermore, managers of radical green detergents suggest that the consumers might have tolerated lower relative performance if traditional competitors had not labelled conventional products of high performance as green, and therefore left the consumer with the conclusion that there were green products of high performance, while there were others, such as the 'radical green' brand suppliers, who also offered green products, but at low performance.*

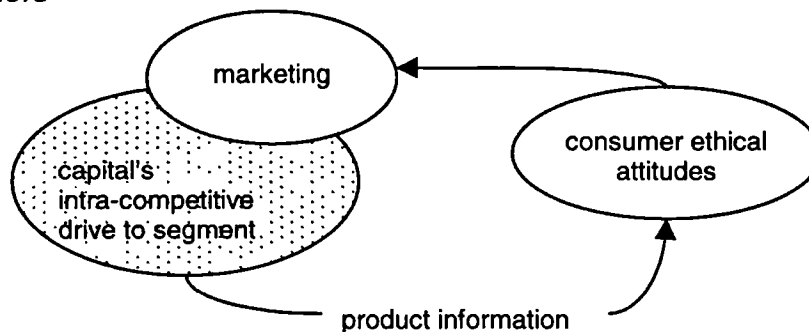
In contrast<sup>190</sup>:

*Managers admitted [in the case of paper products] that, although consumer environmentalism gave the stimulus to promote recycled paper products as 'green', the actual move to recycled pulp in the early eighties came from the closing cost differential between virgin and recycled pulp, implying that the green innovation had occurred before consumer interest required it.*

Although the concept of product performance is treated simplistically, as a utility, the study gives a clear illustration of the differential effects of producer interest to which Fine & Leopold draw attention. Where producer interests broadly coincide with consumer interest, swift market change may be effected. So, producers (significant sections of capital) have responded to environmental pressures in their efforts to segment the market. As Troy<sup>191</sup> points out, this effort to segment the market is in itself an influence on consumers through product (environmental) claims. Continued exposure to product claims reinforces awareness of issues. It may be hypothesised that the economic muscle of producers makes this source of informational reinforcement particularly important. It

would appear that these elements become a self-reinforcing cycle as I have illustrated in Figure 2.2.

*Figure 2.2 marketing and the concurrence of interest between producers and consumers*



Troy presses the point. Of the American experience she says “negative publicity has stemmed from regulatory action taken against firms .... [and as a result of this] consumers are now aware of the concept of biodegradability ... [etc.]”<sup>192</sup>. The nature of any concurrence of interest between producers and consumers will be explored in this study. Conversely, although this seems to be a valid point in terms of generally raising issues on the public agenda, it has been argued that a consequence of ‘product information’, especially products with dubious ‘green’ claims, has been the consumer suspicion<sup>193</sup> confusion and presumed inaction discussed above.

Further, any product will have a position in the market along a number of continuums. These may be conventional such as price and quality but also now ethical (and environmental). In practice the continuum moves, for instance when government legislation removed from the market the most polluting refrigerators. This affects the relative position of all products. What Wong *et al.*<sup>194</sup> are able to show with their household detergent example is the difficulty of positioning in a market where established producers have been able to reconstruct their products as green.

I must return briefly to the concept of utility in household detergents. As with Wong *et al.* Brooker treats the utility as given: “There may even be costs as such use, as in clothes which appear somewhat less than ‘white and bright’ ...”<sup>195</sup>. Baudrillard would no doubt

have us treat 'white and bright' as a less *stable* signifier than do Wong *et al.* and Brooker. It is more useful, I would argue, to understand 'white and bright' not as an immutable utility but as a socially negotiated value in a production and consumption system.

### **2.5.3. the committed and uncommitted**

Following a study of 'The role of ethical concerns in consumer purchase behaviour'<sup>196</sup>

Sandra Berke, Sandra Milberg & Craig Smith asked respondents for their comments. They had been exposed to information, new to them, which showed inconsistencies between their beliefs and purchase behaviour. There seemed a willingness rather than reluctance among respondents to analyse their situation since they were reported using terms like, 'wonder why....', 'I should buy ...', '... conflict....' and 'Although I strongly disagree ...'. Similarly Keane & Willetts<sup>197</sup>, in their study of 'vegetarians', found some conflict was evident for some of their respondents between their ethics and preferences. This was particularly so in those of their sample who were motivated by a repulsion against meat, the morality of eating other animals and animal rights. Significantly they note that, ex-vegetarians may say that they are morally vegetarian but the good taste of meat got to them or they had grown out of their youthful morality. Similarly Shaw<sup>198</sup> reported evidence of a retreat from comprehensive ethical consumption. On a more mundane level, one study into green packaging showed that "... while most people regarded packaging as bad for the environment, they still chose packaged goods over unpackaged alternatives when shopping ... [because of benefits] such as hygiene, convenience, product protection and information ..."<sup>199</sup>. The issues of private transport seem increasingly to epitomise such dilemmas. "[C]omments were made with expressions of guilt, many women in both groups were aware of the environmental impacts of the car, and increasingly of its likely impacts on children's health. Many felt trapped in a double bind."<sup>200</sup>. All these instances confirm the on-going (domestic) moral engagement found by Lunt & Livingstone<sup>201</sup>. These findings raise two questions in relation to my study. How



are decisions made among competing concerns and what relationship exists between this moral tension and personal experience?

In a tentative approach to answering the question what is the ethical space and to what are consumers committed, Cooper-Martin & Holbrook<sup>202</sup> asked respondents to "... list ten of your consumption experiences that involved strong ethical considerations or implications for morality.". This was followed by a short explanation. The authors confirm: "In the responses to the survey, all respondents mentioned at least a few experiences; most ten, suggesting that ethical consumer behaviour is not a rare experience."<sup>203</sup>

Conversely, because they asked consumers to define purchase situations which exhibit ethical issues, especially in the light of some respondents falling short of the 'required' ten, does that mean that they can more-or-less boundary those situations? Shaw<sup>204</sup> found a similar ability to delimit action with regard to price. What if Cooper-Martin & Holbrook's respondents had been asked to list situations which did *not* exhibit ethical issues? As far as ethical consumption is concerned I suggest there are no situations of this sort<sup>205</sup>. But the logic of the research suggests that consumers may hold perfectly genuine ethical views but in many situations they are not engaged.

Further to this Cotgrove & Duff<sup>206</sup> note, from their research, that the holding of 'post-material' values does not exclude the material values. It is, they argue, a case of the relative prominence given to each by the individual. Following Marsh<sup>207</sup>, they suppose a private / public divide. In the Functionalist sociological tradition they cite the example of differing values operating in the family (private) domain and the occupational (public) domain. The former is non-economic (cooperative); the latter economic (competitive). Thus, uncritically, sex is a commodity in the public domain but not in the private, nepotism is a feature of the private domain but frowned upon in the public<sup>208</sup>. They argue, therefore, that: "Values are specific to situations. So when individuals are presented with

a list of social goals, there is no necessary inconsistency if they emphasize goals for society which differ from those appropriate for areas of their personal lives."<sup>209</sup>.

But how does experience affect this 'relative prominence'? To explore this I return to the Burgess *et al.* finding: "The increase of asthma in children and breathing difficulties experienced by elderly people were discussed with some anxiety."<sup>210</sup>. With regard to supposed environmental problems people are feeling themselves impacted<sup>211</sup>. Most people now know of someone who has asthma. Direct involvement or exposure to reality must increase the urgency of an attitude. In this insight I must acknowledge that Petty & Cacioppo under the wonderfully inexpressively named 'Elaboration Likelihood Model'<sup>212</sup> got there first in 1981. They concluded, somewhat obviously, that consumer consciousness of a given issue is likely to be increased by relevance.

Stitts was concerned with the philosophy people bring to their assessment of business practices. There is a longer academic engagement especially in America with the ethics of specific business practices and the study is better developed. Using scaled responses to varying business practices, Stitts finds that the "consumer with religious ties tend to think more deontologically than their counterparts with no religious ties."<sup>213</sup>. In other words we may suppose that a different philosophical problem solving approach is brought to bear on a given consumer dilemma.

By examining behaviour over a seven month period during the introduction of a waste separation scheme Thøgersen<sup>214</sup> found a fall in the perception of difficulties and some evidence of more positive attitudes. The survey used semi-structured interviews and scaled measurements of attitudes. By contrast, Foxall argues that we should be unconcerned with speculation about people's attitudes and commitment but encourage good practice by reward. David Pearce<sup>215</sup> provides the economic framework. Conversely, Thøgersen has demonstrated that commitment is important to a longer term continuation of 'pro-environmental' behaviour. He and Ölander<sup>216</sup> argue that it is an essential part of building a more sustainable society to foster commitment, rather than undermining it by

substituting self-interest. Additionally they argue that governments and experts should not be prescriptive about the way in which people achieve more sustainable lifestyles.

#### **2.5.4. the concerns and aspirations of women and men**

Burgess *et al.*'s<sup>217</sup> comparative focus group research is the only study of environmental attitudes I found to locate consumers within wider concerns. Thus not only are respondents asked about their environmental attitudes but also their concerns over a range of researcher specified issues. We find then that crime is reportedly of more concern than environmental issues and, in certain socio-economic circumstances, unemployment and homelessness loom high. This sets attitudes into a social and economic context. For example famine, an issue of considerable moral import, was not seen as important by as many in the British town as in the Netherlands town. Since the samples were socio-economically balanced by the researchers the difference is likely to be in the social and political context.

Additionally in Burgess *et al.*'s focus groups we are treated to people introducing a wider range of concerns and aspirations. For instance, aspirations are glimpsed when "[t]he men ... discussed the symbolic value of car ownership, the machismo associated with a fast car, the status and freedom that a car gave."<sup>218</sup> If this social construction is so forceful among the men of Britain and the Netherlands, so effective in opposing their moral beliefs, in their consumption patterns, how can their other actions be explained without reference to football, the lottery, their children, computer, television, holidays and travel, loves, passions ..... I have given this section the title 'women and men' to emphasize as much as possible the few studies where consumers are accepted as rounded people. But the concerns of women and men may be different.

*The women discussed how they re-organised their household practices to conform with new responsibilities expected of participants in the recycling scheme. They worried that recycling would take additional time and effort. There was particular concern about how elderly people would cope, and how people without gardens would be able to deal with organic waste.*

In this passage Burgess *et al.*<sup>219</sup> illustrate women's concern that a more ethical society will mean more work. That women especially balance competing demands is, of course, not an uncommon theme<sup>220</sup>. Since the men mentioned no such concern we may presume a difference between the sexes on this matter. With cars, while men were concerned with sign-value, women were concerned with use-value. Issues of personal safety<sup>221</sup> Burgess *et al.* say were paramount for the women. Stitts, looking more fundamentally at consumer's ethical values, found "[t]he most significant differences were ... between males and females ... indicating a need to further investigate the thought process of each (sic.) gender when assessing ethical behaviour."<sup>222</sup> Accepting this division is not to argue that women are always practical and that sign-value is of no interest but broadly, that as Warde<sup>223</sup> in a more general review of consumer theory says, significantly different aspirations and concerns between the sexes are important in different 'modes of delivery' [0].

Within this more 'complete' view of consumption ethical consumers' behaviour may have been more in line with their attitudes. As Warde<sup>224</sup> points out, however, production may be moved between these modes: domestic to state; state to private etc. The study of the change over time is important, he says, and change may certainly be argued as raising or altering ethical concerns.

#### **2.5.5. boycotts and buycotts**

In a survey of the consumer research literature Friedman<sup>225</sup> found few instances of 'consumer buycotts', i.e., efforts by consumer activists to induce shoppers to buy the

products of selected companies in order to reward these firms for behaviour consistent with the goals of the activists. Whilst Friedman sees boycotts as the active but unselfish advancement of, primarily, for-profit companies he includes for instance European “initiatives to buy coffee grown by small Third World producers.”<sup>226</sup> He concurs with the behaviourist position that, in such collective consumer action, positive reinforcement of good producer practice is to be preferred to negative ‘boycott’.

By contrast boycotts are legion in affluent societies. From selected case studies carried out in the 1980s Smith ascribes a twin role to boycotts. “Consumer boycotts [and perhaps we may add boycotts] should be judged as symbolic acts as well as their effectiveness.”<sup>227</sup>

Taking something of a different line to his mentor, Foxall, Smith sees boycotts as establishing moral obligation; the climate for a rise in business ethics. In this beneficial role, pressure groups are seen as pivotal in providing information to consumers. Gabriel & Lang<sup>228</sup> express this indirect effect as a “critical commentary on commodities sustained by continuing, mutating and merging consumer boycotts.” I shall use these established terms, boycott and boycott, to refer generally to organised consumer action.

## **2.6. chapter summary**

There has been a belated academic interest in consumers, rescued from the abstractions of polemic politics. This interest has reinvigorated contentious issues of motivation, attitudes, decision making and behaviour fought over thin, abstracted and decontextualised data. Often these debates engage at an entirely theoretical level. Moreover some very valuable insights have been totalised in academic arguments and protagonists have *tended* to construct people unproblematically only as consumers. The social and environmental issues integral to consumption are, I have argued however, of *more* than academic interest.

I have noted approvingly the attempts of academics like Miller, Gabriel & Lang, Warde and Fine & Leopold to counter the highly theoretical tendency. They have argued in favour of accepting that people have a diverse set of reasons for consuming and that their

consumption cannot be understood without reference to systems of capitalisation, production and retailing. Additionally at the theoretical level I have noted that we consumers may become locked into systems of consumption and that there are coincidences as well as conflicts of consumer and producer interest.

Lunt & Livingstone and Burgess *et al.* present empirical research which I have suggested *does* set consumers in a wider social context. Their research has shown the complex and sometimes ambivalent relationship between consumers as people and consumer society.

Most extensive research into ethical consumers takes the viewpoint of the producer rather than the consumer<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless this research, including market research, has highlighted important issues concerning the apparent rise of the ethical consumer. It has charted the widening of consumer interest from environmental to a broad spectrum of social concerns, especially among the higher socio-economic groups, and among more women than men. At the same time researchers have reported a fall in those disinterested in these ethical issues but also the confusion many consumers exhibit. From this, however, apparently irresolvable debates have arisen around the so called 'words / deeds inconsistency', questions of product quality and price and, within the sustainability debate, conflicting concepts of communication aimed at modifying behaviour. My approach seeks to redefine these debates by showing the limitations of individual action and by employing a more rounded conceptualisation of the consumer.

Of course there are competing concepts of human motivation: normative, effective, habitual, rational etc. I have argued that, to some extent, they may be seen as alternative ways of viewing motivation placing emphasis on different aspects of the phenomenon. I have chosen to view ethical consumers as boundedly rational because of their complex, contradictory and daunting decision making environment. I will understand such actions to be taken within market relationships where consumers may exit from products and voice their opinions with effect, but where they are not sovereign. However, it is

consistent with this view that I would welcome alternative research from other perspectives as strengthening the insights.

notes and references:

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- <sup>1</sup> Midgley (1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Miller (1995), p1.
- <sup>3</sup> Schlegelmilch (1994), p68.
- <sup>4</sup> Schlegelmilch (1994), p57-8.
- <sup>5</sup> Brooker (1976), p107.
- <sup>6</sup> See also my argument against the idea that an ideology based on self-interest can incorporate a concept of the ethical consumer. Newholm (1999b).
- <sup>7</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p188 make this point in their review.
- <sup>8</sup> The term 'affluent world' here is used to denote the relatively affluent majority of people in 'post-industrial' social formations such as Europe and the USA but increasingly minorities in poorer countries. It is used in preference to 'Western world' because by the dynamic nature of capital application this is becoming an anachronism, and to 'developed world' because of its implied value-system.
- <sup>9</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995).
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, Smith (1990), Featherstone (1991), Lunt & Livingstone (1992), Miller (1995) and Gabriel & Lang (1995).
- <sup>11</sup> Baudrillard (1970), p 45, poses the theoretical problem of rising consumerism.
- <sup>12</sup> Galbraith (1962), p135.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p 136.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p 137.
- <sup>15</sup> Baudrillard (1970), p43 and p40.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p 43.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p 29.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p 30.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p 33.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p 41.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p 45.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p 46.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p 29.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p 45, (*my emphasis*).
- <sup>25</sup> Jackson (1993), p208; Gabriel & Lang (1995), p4 make a similar point.
- <sup>26</sup> Jackson (1993), p209.
- <sup>27</sup> Warde (1992), p22.
- <sup>28</sup> Douglas & Isherwood (1979).
- <sup>29</sup> Warde (1992).
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. p26.
- <sup>31</sup> Sivanandan cited in Jackson (1993), p216.
- <sup>32</sup> Baudrillard (1970), p47.
- <sup>33</sup> Poster's (1988), p7 introduction to Baudrillard's work.
- <sup>34</sup> Lunt & Livingstone (1992), p171.

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- <sup>35</sup> Baudrillard (1970), p7.
- <sup>36</sup> Warde (1995), p24/5.
- <sup>37</sup> I take sign-value to be the (temporary) *social* attribute of a product which may be acquired by a consumer for its identity-value.
- <sup>38</sup> Warde (1994), p65 makes this point.
- <sup>39</sup> Kellner (1995), p299.
- <sup>40</sup> Douglas & Isherwood (1979).
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p67.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p66.
- <sup>43</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993).
- <sup>44</sup> Lunt & Livingstone (1992), p18.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p171.
- <sup>46</sup> Baudrillard (1970).
- <sup>47</sup> Warde (1992), p68.
- <sup>48</sup> Featherstone (1991).
- <sup>49</sup> Warde (1992).
- <sup>50</sup> Wright (1978).
- <sup>51</sup> Smith (1990), p3.
- <sup>52</sup> Gonsse (1990), p135.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p142.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p139.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., p136/7.
- <sup>56</sup> Lang (1998), p112.
- <sup>57</sup> Fine & Leopold, (1993), p22.
- <sup>58</sup> Gonsse (1990), p137. See also Newholm (1999b).
- <sup>59</sup> Abercrombie (1994), pp4/5. Smith (1990) notes general acceptance of a similar shift of power to the consumer in his work on ethical consumers.
- <sup>60</sup> Smith (1990), p35.
- <sup>61</sup> In Fine & Leopold, (1993), p21, system of provision refers to the economic and social processes and structures by which production and consumption of a commodity or group of commodities is currently made. It is a vertical structuration each with different characteristics.
- <sup>62</sup> Powell (1969), p33.
- <sup>63</sup> Baudrillard (1970); Ekins (1989); Friedman, (1996); Hansen & Schrader, (1997); Wells & Jetter (1991).
- <sup>64</sup> Adams (1996), p3. See also Newholm (1998).
- <sup>65</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p46.
- <sup>66</sup> Gonsse (1990), p138.
- <sup>67</sup> For example: Carman (1992) and Foxall (1994).
- <sup>68</sup> Schlegelmilch (1994).
- <sup>69</sup> See Ch.9, section on 'advise to ethical consumers'.
- <sup>70</sup> Brown (1992).
- <sup>71</sup> See discussion in Gabriel & Lang (1995), pp37-42 and Lang (1998).
- <sup>72</sup> For a discussion see Etzioni (1988).
- <sup>73</sup> Warde (1992).



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- <sup>74</sup> 'Episodes' here refer to complete processes of production and consumption whether market or non-market in nature.
- <sup>75</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p37.
- <sup>76</sup> Herbig & Kramer (1994), p49.
- <sup>77</sup> Miller (1995), p9.
- <sup>78</sup> Baudrillard (1970), p53.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., p55.
- <sup>80</sup> Lachs (1981), p9.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., p12.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., p12.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., p13.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., p17.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.17.
- <sup>86</sup> Midgley (1996).
- <sup>87</sup> Zey (1992).
- <sup>88</sup> Camic (1992).
- <sup>89</sup> Zey (1992), p187.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., p191.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., p191.
- <sup>92</sup> Simon (1982), p2.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., p2.
- <sup>94</sup> Etzioni (1992), p100.
- <sup>95</sup> Frank (1992).
- <sup>96</sup> Zey (1992), p166.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., p179.
- <sup>98</sup> Campbell (1995) also makes this point strongly.
- <sup>99</sup> Both Gabriel & Lang (1995) and Miller (1995) make this point strongly in their reviews.
- <sup>100</sup> Diderot noted the human tendency to want to see order in possessions such that a new, inconsistent, item would trigger a succession of purchases to bring back harmony. Hence 'Diderot set'.
- <sup>101</sup> Mishan cited in Gabriel & Lang (1995), p37.
- <sup>102</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995) conclude their chapter on consumer as victim in this manner.
- <sup>103</sup> Etzioni (1988), p9.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid., p11.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid., p11.
- <sup>106</sup> Also commended in this respect by Jackson (1993), p223 and Miller (1995).
- <sup>107</sup> Lunt & Livingstone (1992), p168.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid., p166.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid., p170.
- <sup>110</sup> Mulgan cited in Lunt & Livingstone (1992), p169.
- <sup>111</sup> Jackson (1993), p215.
- <sup>112</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995).
- <sup>113</sup> Jackson (1993).
- <sup>114</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993).

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- <sup>115</sup> Warde (1992).
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., p28.
- <sup>117</sup> Hirschman (1979).
- <sup>118</sup> Miller (1995), p8 - that a majority in Britain must be considered affluent is of course significant in a democratic state.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid., p51.
- <sup>120</sup> Dragon Research (1995), p10.
- <sup>121</sup> Ibid., p9.
- <sup>122</sup> Ibid., p9.
- <sup>123</sup> Lloyd (1992a&b).
- <sup>124</sup> Halsall (1995) in the *Guardian*.
- <sup>125</sup> Worcester (1996).
- <sup>126</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>127</sup> Gallup (1995).
- <sup>128</sup> ICOM (1993).
- <sup>129</sup> Dragon Research (1991), p10.
- <sup>130</sup> Ibid., p7.
- <sup>131</sup> CWS (1995), p8.
- <sup>132</sup> MORI (1994).
- <sup>133</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>134</sup> MORI (1994).
- <sup>135</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995).
- <sup>136</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>137</sup> Mintel (1994): N=981.
- <sup>138</sup> NOP Omnibus Survey (1994).
- <sup>139</sup> Such practices are discouraged in the simplest of texts: Bell (1987).
- <sup>140</sup> See discussion of 'social desirability bias' in Fisher (1993).
- <sup>141</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>142</sup> Lloyd (1992b), p29. HPI and Mintel confirmed by telephone that they kept no records of the refusal rate.
- <sup>143</sup> See Waller (1995) for a review where I think some similarities between extensive research of the election and ethical consumption are striking.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid., p105.
- <sup>145</sup> Dragon Research (1994), p9.
- <sup>146</sup> Mintel (1994), p54.
- <sup>147</sup> Berke, Milberg & Smith (1993).
- <sup>148</sup> Peatie (1992); Foxall (1994); Schlegelmilch (1994); Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995) and Strong (1996), for instance are reviewed here.
- <sup>149</sup> Strong (1996), p11.
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid., p5.
- <sup>151</sup> Brooker (1976), p110.
- <sup>152</sup> See also Cotgrove & Duff (1981).
- <sup>153</sup> Ölander & Thøgersen (1995) p356.
- <sup>154</sup> Foxall (1994).
- <sup>155</sup> Foxall (1984).

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- <sup>156</sup> I have been particularly influenced by Midgley's (1996) critique of Skinner on philosophical grounds. Additionally Ölander & Thøgersen (1995), p355 set aside behaviourism for practical reasons.
- <sup>157</sup> Etzioni (1988), pp46-7.
- <sup>158</sup> Ölander & Thøgersen (1995), p352.
- <sup>159</sup> Dembkoski and Hanmer-Lloyd (1994).
- <sup>160</sup> Ölander & Thøgersen (1995).
- <sup>161</sup> Dembkoski and Hanmer-Lloyd (1994).
- <sup>162</sup> Fallows & Gosden (1985), p45.
- <sup>163</sup> Ibid., p43.
- <sup>164</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>165</sup> Keane & Willetts (1995).
- <sup>166</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), p33.
- <sup>167</sup> Troy (1993), p113.
- <sup>168</sup> Dembkoski & Hanmer-Lloyd (1994).
- <sup>169</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), p36.
- <sup>170</sup> Ibid., p39.
- <sup>171</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>172</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), p3.
- <sup>173</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993).
- <sup>174</sup> Berry (1983), p411.
- <sup>175</sup> Foxall (1994).
- <sup>176</sup> Suchard & Aghawal (1993).
- <sup>177</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>178</sup> Ibid., p116.
- <sup>179</sup> Foxall (1994).
- <sup>180</sup> Carroll (1995), p167.
- <sup>181</sup> Carroll (1995).
- <sup>182</sup> Cotgrove & Duff (1981).
- <sup>183</sup> Respectively: Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), Ölander & Thøgersen (1995) and Foxall (1994).
- <sup>184</sup> Simintiras, Schlegelmilch & Diamantopoulos (1994), p21.
- <sup>185</sup> Ibid., p2.
- <sup>186</sup> Cotgrove & Duff (1981).
- <sup>187</sup> Simintiras, Schlegelmilch & Diamantopoulos (1994).
- <sup>188</sup> Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995), p4.
- <sup>189</sup> Anonymous cited in Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995), p24.
- <sup>190</sup> Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995), p8.
- <sup>191</sup> Troy (1993), p108.
- <sup>192</sup> Ibid., p108.
- <sup>193</sup> Simintiras, Schlegelmilch & Diamantopoulos (1994).
- <sup>194</sup> Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995).
- <sup>195</sup> Brooker (1976), p110.
- <sup>196</sup> Berke, Milberg & Smith (1993).

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- <sup>197</sup> Keane & Willetts (1995).
- <sup>198</sup> Shaw & Clarke (1999).
- <sup>199</sup> Pegram Walters Associates cited in Wong, Turner & Stoneman (1995), p3.
- <sup>200</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), underlining in the original.
- <sup>201</sup> Lunt & Livingstone (1992).
- <sup>202</sup> Cooper-Martin & Holebrook (1993), p114.
- <sup>203</sup> Ibid., p114.
- <sup>204</sup> Shaw & Clarke (1999).
- <sup>205</sup> In *The Ethical Primate*, Midgley (1996) for instance argues that it is the capacity of humans to visualise that renders all decisions as of a moral nature.
- <sup>206</sup> Cotgrove & Duff (1981), p102.
- <sup>207</sup> Marsh cited in Cotgrove & Duff (1981).
- <sup>208</sup> Cotgrove & Duff (1983), p101.
- <sup>209</sup> Ibid., p101.
- <sup>210</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995), p31.
- <sup>211</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>212</sup> Petty & Cacioppo cited in Troy (1993).
- <sup>213</sup> Stitts (1992).
- <sup>214</sup> Thøgersen cited in Ölander & Thøgersen (1995), p353.
- <sup>215</sup> Pearce, Markandya & Barbier (1994).
- <sup>216</sup> Ölander & Thøgersen (1995).
- <sup>217</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995).
- <sup>218</sup> Ibid., p31.
- <sup>219</sup> Ibid., p24.
- <sup>220</sup> See for instance Lang & Caraher (1998), p206, with respect to 'healthy eating, .... taste, waste and value for money'.
- <sup>221</sup> Burgess, Harrison & Filius (1995) do not refer to the counter view that by their increasing use of cars women isolate themselves and decrease their safety.
- <sup>222</sup> Stitts (1992), pp89-90.
- <sup>223</sup> Warde (1992).
- <sup>224</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>225</sup> Friedman (1996).
- <sup>226</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>227</sup> Smith (1995).
- <sup>228</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p146.
- <sup>229</sup> Burke, Milberg & Smith (1993).

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### 3. an holistic enquiry: methodology

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In the preceding chapter, in line with one strand of the words / deeds inconsistency debate, I argued that it is inevitably difficult to make sense of the reported preferences of isolated ethical consumers. At their least revealing, the studies to which I referred in chapter two adopt “the standard approach where [...] inferences are based on decontextualised bits and pieces”<sup>1</sup> drawn from structured surveys which are “notoriously open to misinterpretation”<sup>2</sup>. At both the individual and social level, much else that is relevant goes on in peoples’ lives. If I am to address the questions I posed in the introduction I must, therefore, adopt an holistic methodology. In this respect the research I set out in this chapter “... resembles detective work ...”<sup>3</sup>.

I start the chapter by proposing a much closer identification between the researcher and respondent than is usual. Following this some time is spent developing and clarifying the central but restricted position of the theory of bounded rationality in this research. This necessarily concludes with a very brief exploration and critique of the notion of rationality being employed. The main section (3.4) sets out and justifies the methodological protocol but detailed procedures and examples of developed practices are considered in the subsequent chapter. Sections 3.5 to 3.7 clarify the structure of the study, its methodologies and analytical categories. In the final section I set out the exploratory nature of the study and three theoretical propositions.

#### **3.1. researcher as consumer; consumer as co-researcher**

The supposed position of the researcher and researched must be made clear before returning to the stuff of this chapter. Consumer researchers (scientists) almost invariably write in a curious disembodied manner. Researchers speak of *the* consumer, *their* attitude and *their* behaviour; seeking understandings of this considerable *sub-category* of humans whose (over-)consumption is the potential source of enhancing profitability and, or

perhaps alternatively, threatens to disrupt our (and their own) comfortable existence.

Either imperative is sufficient to command research.

Typical of this 'objective' approach is Dembkoski and Hanmer-Lloyd<sup>4</sup>, who through most of their work refer to *the* consumer. Surely *the* consumer being researched is most emphatically *we* and not they. If there is a problem it is as much our lifestyle as social scientists as anyone else's that is in question. It is our over-consumption that is documented as problematical by Durning<sup>5</sup> or ethically questionable to Singer<sup>6</sup>.

We, as researchers, seek to understand ourselves and others in 'consumer' society and the consumer is in this important sense *inclusive*. I shall therefore often use the pronoun 'we' when referring to consumers in the affluent world; researcher as consumer.

In a similar way the reader will find that I refer to those who take part in my study, not conventionally as respondents, but as 'co-researchers'. Expanding on my brief reference to this terminology in the opening chapter, this is because in a significant sense I will be facilitating my co-researchers' enquiry into their own consumption, ethical or otherwise. Whilst it would be pretentious to exaggerate this, there is reason to believe that activities like filling in questionnaires, collecting receipts, and preparing for a visiting researcher are situations prompting (often social) reflection. There are therefore narrative building processes that constitute a significant part of the study that are semi-independent of the researcher's role; consumer as co-researcher.

### **3.2. *epistemology and a frame of bounded rationality***

There are I have argued good reasons for adopting a frame of bounded rationality for this study. To reiterate, firstly the problem as formulated in the introduction is about decision making in daunting circumstances; the very stuff of bounded rationality. The theory was developed from specific insights in this respect, as a counter to the notion of perfect deliberation. Secondly I am seeking to understand consumers whose actual purchasing is invariably seen, whether as a critique, observation or approvingly, as an individualised

practice. Thus this is not to argue from an individualistic perspective, simply to note that the phenomenon being observed has a significant individualised component<sup>7</sup> although the social context is not to be ignored. Thirdly, not all human situations may be amenable to theories of choice. Whilst others have argued, for instance, that the understanding of consumption in general is best developed alternatively within a structural, normative or postmodern perspective, ethical consumption derives its epithet, 'ethical', from the fundamental concept of choice. Thus although other studies may usefully apply a variety of perspectives, I am confident there is good reason for considering ethical consumption as boundedly rational. Finally, I have argued that it will be, at least to a significant degree, possible to explain phenomena that have been the subject of a supposed conundrum; the words / deeds inconsistency. As Raymond Boudon, recommending bounded rationality says, "trying to substitute subjectively rational explanations of social behaviour for the currently irrational explanations is a major task of the social scientist."<sup>8</sup>

However, 'rational choice' is the term often used to refer to a very wide group of theories. These include those that see humans as perfect rationalisers as well as the imperfect deliberators and systematic decision makers of bounded rationality. David Lane, Franco Malerba, Robert Maxfield & Luigi Orsenigo<sup>9</sup>, for instance, direct their critique of the concept of human deliberation to "encompass much of bounded rationality literature as well as neo-classical optimising theory". Thus, it is not just the neo-classical theory that individuals are supposed to take action based on decisions resulting from clear and unambiguous preferences, full knowledge and unlimited computational power that they find incredible. At the other extremity of their category they include theories of bounded rationality that postulate limited attention and rational deliberation but in conditions of ambiguity and complexity. Clearly these forms need to be distinguished and I will additionally make a broad distinction between prescriptive and descriptive approaches. It will be seen that I want to draw considerably more from the latter than the former.

### 3.2.1. prescriptive and descriptive decision making theory

As I have noted in the previous chapter, when the notion of bounded rationality was distinguished from that of perfect rationality by Simon in the 1950s a whole field of new research was prefigured. Simon and colleagues at MIT have moved from an initial concern with revealing and *describing* the processes of decision making where attention and information are limited to modelling cybernetics. Their work is primarily concerned with parallels between artificial and human decision making. Indeed Simon regrets there has not been more progress towards revealing the “common features of this theory of thinking”<sup>10</sup> and hence meta-decision making processes.

The early insights also led to a theoretical investigation of decision making through game play situations. This proved a powerful investigative tool giving rise to such insights as Robert Axelrod’s<sup>11</sup> assertion of the logic of ‘tit-for tat’ coupled with the presumption of cooperation over competition. This effective challenge to egoethics is clearly important to the present study.

Rational action theories have had a significant impact generally in the social sciences. James Coleman’s<sup>12</sup> theoretical work in sociology, reconsidering the relationship between agency and structure in a predominantly post-structuralist era has been both influential and provocative. Parallel debates in philosophy and psychology on the nature of rationality have sometimes led to a quest for mathematical modelling of decision making. Some economists set about re-engineering predictive models in accordance with their new more complex insights. New economic decision modelling has taken essentially the same mathematical approach as the neo-classical economics from which it departs but of course attempts to make less heroic assumptions.

By contrast James March concerns himself mostly with decision making procedures. Insights primarily in relation to organisations emphasise the social nature of decision making. An important content in his enquiry is often remodelling or engineering to *prescribe* decision making. What perhaps lifts his work above others is his incorporation of



a “dialectic between reason and foolishness”<sup>13</sup>. Unlike the economists, March’s empirical work does not constrain decision making within a rigidly serious frame; a rationale for decisions may, for instance, be found in the enjoyment of the social exchanges leading to it.

I should not perhaps suggest a bifurcation of bounded rationality into a ‘prescriptive’, quantitative and predictive form and an alternative ‘descriptive’, qualitative form.

However, it is important to note a considerable difference of emphasis between those who seek to capture, replicate mechanically, and improve current processes and others who document and wonder at the exceptional qualities of human decision making. A central debate in bounded rationality has developed between those who agree with Simon that we seek a calculus of rationality and critics such as Lane *et al.*, who argue that there is little evidence of calculations taking place and they anyway consume unnecessary attention. An exemplar is to be found in Herbert Drapfus & Stuart Drapfus<sup>14</sup> arguing that:

*The conscious use of calculative rationality produces regression to the skill of novice or, at best, the competent performer. To think rationally in that sense is to forsake know-how and is not usually desirable.*

Experts decide intuitively, they argue, and deliberation would be counter productive. March straddles this divide. When asked if decision engineering could be shown to be effective he thought it “on balance to have done more good than harm”<sup>15</sup>. *The present task however, is not theoretical.* My intention is neither to remodel decision making nor to argue in favour of a reconceptualisation of any theoretical positions.

### **3.2.2. a tool rather than a perspective**

Two interconnected considerations are fundamental to my use of bounded rationality and I will now restate them. First is that the concept is not used as if it were *the* fundamental explanation of human behaviour as Simon’s pursuit of a meta-theory implies. I have

above stated that alternative explanations of the phenomenon would be welcomed from choice, emotivist and normative perspectives. A brief extract from Midgley<sup>16</sup> addressing 'the illusion of the single viewpoint' might be useful here.

*The object we are studying - for instance human nature - needs to be conceived as something vast, complex and relatively distant, perhaps something like a mountain. Different approaches show this mountain from different sides. The various views of it can vary dramatically, so much so that sometimes the enquirer wonders 'Can this be the same mountain? Can these two sets of people be investigating the same phenomenon?' But patient travelling between the observation stations will show why these differences arise.*

Thus for Midgley, and I would agree, it is the interplay of perspectives that has value and the insistence on a singular viewpoint, and especially reductionism, that poses danger.

Secondly, the frame of bounded rationality may therefore be seen as the use of an appropriate tool. In this respect I am encouraged by Colin Leys<sup>17</sup> referring to the use of rational choice theory as 'not necessarily unwelcome' in political analysis. Leys is a Marxist and might therefore be expected to demand an uncompromisingly collectivist analysis. My position, as I have explained, is that in the case of ethical consumption there are good reasons for researching individual decisions. These must, however, be set within a social context.

### **3.2.3. returning to the insights of bounded rationality**

In the preceding chapter I have, for all the familiar reasons, rejected a neo-classical model of human decision making even as a tool. I favour a frame of bounded rationality *for the present study* for the reasons set out above. The descriptive phase of bounded rationality gave rise to a number of vignettes<sup>18</sup> that offer insights into human behaviour. March usefully outlines these. Because much of the work of March looks at organisational and management systems, in terms of methodology it is therefore not *directly* applicable to

consumer theory. However, my interest is to employ the vignettes March outlines (see below) as a categories in a framework for *understanding* consumer decisions. In this respect whether consumers deliberate on the ethics of consumption or employ decision systems is not important at this stage. Both possibilities are allowed for in March's collected insights; the approach is inclusive.

However, there appear to be a number of general terms in current use relating to bounded rationality. Bounded rationality, the preferred term in this work, was coined by Simon to represent the empirical concept of human decision making where the possibilities of attention and computation are not unlimited, and aims may be conflicting in an ambiguous environment. I take it to encompass a very broad range of alternative decision-making both limited *deliberational processes* and *systematic procedures*.

Limited rationality, March says, stresses the limits of human attention and computation in calculated choices. The term is therefore taken to relate specifically to deliberative processes. Simon's<sup>19</sup> concept of satisficing is perhaps the archetypal concept deriving from the deliberative approach.

Subjective rationality was another term used by Simon, but is defined by Raymond Boudon to represent the concept of rational action following 'theory, principles or conjecture' which are mostly well founded. Whether the adopted procedure proves to be ill founded, Boudon argues, does not alter the fact that the subject had good reason to expect a satisfactory result. However, both the notion of subjective rationality and its 'everyday' sense<sup>20</sup> will require further examination.

To complete my justification of the application of bounded rationality some examples of the insights and debates within the notion are set out below. This is to indicate the immediate appeal of the theory. Simon<sup>21</sup> argued that patterns of decision making that he refers to as 'general problem solvers' can be seen as "playing an important role in the gradual modification of the subject's behaviour as he (sic.) familiarises himself with the

problem material.”<sup>22</sup> The possession of domain specific knowledge (DSK) by a subject, that is knowledge of direct relevance to the specific domain of decision making, in this case that of consuming ethically, strengthens means-end analysis. DSK, stored, according to Simon, in *productions*, is what distinguishes expert from novice. In contrast to this, Draphus & Draphus characterise such knowledge as an intermediate stage between novice and expert; experts are intuitional. Such views will be examined in this study.

John Carroll & Eric Johnson<sup>23</sup> note that ‘chronometric techniques’ suggest that the time taken in making decisions does not increase proportionately with size of task and even that “... for some subjects, bigger decision problems even result in shorter latencies. [Some have] taken this as evidence that subjects switch to simplifying strategies ...” It follows from this that there should be no necessary expectation of a relationship between increasing complexity and task time.

By contrast, Boudon<sup>24</sup> says that:

*“... for people with an interest in politics, judging a party on its principles can be a good conjecture. For those less interested, it can be rational to use simpler signals: checking whether the candidate looks sincere, for instance. In this case the voter makes the conjecture that there is a correlation between the signal and the outcomes he (sic.) is interested in ...”*

Likewise Olaf Dahlbäck<sup>25</sup> argues that “[i]f the choice is important or if it concerns a unique situation, individuals use more of their cognitive resources and consider more carefully the advantages and disadvantages of different alternatives ...”. From these insights I might expect the allocation of time given to ethics in consuming to vary with concern but not extent. These seem to me to be important insights appropriate to the understanding of decision making in daunting conditions: the boundaries. However, I must now concern myself with the understanding of ‘rationality’ employed in the concept.

### **3.2.4. my preferred methodology**

The favoured research method of Simon's, and many exponents of bounded rationality, is *verbal protocol*. Subjects are required to talk constantly through their decision making as it occurs. Through this they are looking to expose the *processes of rationality* by uncovering the actual decision. However, although I considered the method for the present study, and it has some advantages, I decided it was inappropriate because I was not looking for an absolute theory of decision making which seems to be the eventual aim of Simon and the 'prescriptive' bounded rationalists; more for probabilities in given situations. Simon particularly looks for reasoning processes in to decision making and verbal protocols are useful in that they purport to record these. Although I find the overall theory of bounded rationality compelling, I do not want to exclude systemic procedures such as habit and imitation where deliberation may be minimal. Additionally theoretical difficulties arise because:

1. 'ethical consumer' decisions may be built up over a period of time and the actual heuristic etc., deployed at the point of purchase might not be evident and;
2. unlike contrived or experimental shopping situations co-researchers may not necessarily know when the urge to ethically consume is about to come upon them.

And practically:

1. it is unlikely that I could persuade co-researchers to carry out a verbal protocol on their own initiative;
2. co-researchers would have to be very extrovert to be able to talk continuously into an audio tape recorder while making a purchase in public, and;
3. I would not be present to check compliance with requirements, say to speak continuously.

However I considered it would be useful to construct what might be referred to as quasi-verbal protocols. These are outlined in 0.

### **3.3. a presumption of rationality**

Boudon<sup>26</sup> says: "Subjective rationality is rational to the extent that the actor applied it with some expectation of it working; in most circumstances it would work. Most people in a similar situation would agree it is rational." Similarly John Griffiths<sup>27</sup> cautions that in the study of human behaviour "... however bizarre their behavior may seem at first glance, most ordinary people are not stupider, crazier, or more confused than the average social scientist, [and to this limited extent] it is useful to describe them as rational actors."

Boudon's concept of rationality appears to imply that the decision making is concerned only with consequences. This is not the intention since Boudon refers to such rationality as following 'theory, *principles* or conjecture'. We could equally therefore take, say, behaviour that is intended to signal compliance with a principle as subjectively rational.

R. M. Hare<sup>28</sup>, important because his philosophy of Generalisable Prescriptivism is dependent on a subjective notion of rationality, identifies two necessary components to rationality: knowledge of the situation and logic in the process linking preferences, knowledge and behaviour.

Two issues are commonly disputed in the debate about what should be considered rational. These are whether the aims of the subject are to be considered and if so whether they are rational, and secondly, the extent to which relevant knowledge should be considered. I will take the latter first because it is central to the argument in favour of understanding human behaviour as boundedly rational.

A criticism of the concepts of bounded rationality forwarded by Robin Marris<sup>29</sup> might usefully illustrate the point I wish to make. Marris prefers the term 'intelligent rationality' to bounded rationality or its equivalents, because he takes an opposing view that rational action should be considered to have been based on sound theory and not 'rectifiable ignorance'.

Marris's critique of bounded rationality is typical of economists in that it suggests that an objectively rational option exists and 'failure' to choose it, through limited rationality,

results from 'rectifiable ignorance'. Marris gives a perfectly reasonable, and I think standard, example of additional knowledge which would turn a limited rational, but incorrect response into an intelligently rational correct response. This argument, however, misses a number of points.

Marris supposes that all aims are uncritically economic. Knowledge, even economic, is rarely unambiguous and incontestable. The concept of 'correct' decisions is therefore problematical. More importantly, one additional piece of knowledge is easily assimilated for one decision but the rectification of ignorance in the broadest sense is quite a different matter. Bounded rationality seems therefore especially appropriate to studies that do not seek to extract single decisions from context. We should, for example, certainly consider the *obsessive* search for information irrational. To use Hare's<sup>30</sup> illustration of deciding whether or not to accept a proffered coffee, to ask the nature of the coffee might be considered quite rational. Whilst additional knowledge such as one's current and expected heart rate might be seen as rectifying ignorance, seeking such information in such a (trivial) situation would lead to escalating diversion of purpose and almost certainly therefore a charge of irrationality.

Whilst it is possible to illustrate extreme situations of uninformed irrationality or obsessive information seeking it is difficult to define information proportionate and relevant to any given decision task. I suggest the notion of rational action may be allowed to be inclusive.

The other matter, relating to subjectivity, is addressed by noting that the issue of rationality is internal. The concern here, as Hare<sup>31</sup> insists, is with the logic of the decision in linking the actors' preferences with knowledge to facilitate behaviour. Behaviour may be irrational, Hare argues, if insufficient relevant information were sought (I would want to add, in proportion to the perceived importance of the decision) or the process of logic were at fault (say some factors were ignored) but in the absence of such, behaviour must be presumed to be rational.

To consider whether an action or preference is moral is a different matter Hare cautions. So, for instance, Hare sees himself as a consequentialist but in common with Kant and deontologists would require that the rationale for an action be universalisable. Neither the prudence nor morality is, he argues however, necessary to seeing behaviour as rational. The notion of rationality espoused here therefore employs a concept of logic and knowledge sufficient to the perceived importance of the issue. What is 'sufficient' is a matter of judgement facilitated by the researcher and co-researcher laying out narrative explanations for consideration.

To help in this judgement I want to enlist the three major (competing) philosophical positions on ethics: virtue theory, consequentialism and duty (deontology). My purpose is to adopt these as categories through which I may better understand co-researchers' rationales. This is not an unique approach as Stitts'<sup>32</sup> invocation of deontology in considering ethical consumers illustrates. Additionally an example of common usage of such philosophical terms as virtue was given in chapter one.

The theory adopted here is that understanding of motivation may be facilitated by categorising co-researchers' given reasons for action. Reasoning, for example, that relates to good human qualities that co-researchers wish to cultivate counts as pursuant of virtue; concern that their consumer behaviour should have good general utility implies consequentialism; and deontological reasoning would be illustrated by concern to do the right thing regardless of outcome.

In this section it has not been intended to defend a particular view of rationality in philosophical terms. I would not feel equipped so to do. Again, a presumed rationality, of the nature outlined, is an analytical tool. Primarily its value is to orientate the researcher towards a presumption of rationality. Thus I see it as the researcher's task to strive, with their co-researcher, to make sense of the latter's position whether or not this is ultimately successful. The rationality of the position presented is the judgement of the researcher in analysis and the reader in reviewing the account.



### **3.4. methodology: holistic, sympathetic, deep yet specific**

I intend a methodology which will, a) facilitate a holistic view of 'the consumer' as a person, but b) in relation to specific purchase events, rather than in generalised behavioural categories, c) elicit considered responses from the co-researchers, and d) encourage a rapport between me, the researcher, and co-researchers. Thus a close look is required at our actual, as distinct from categorical, purchasing behaviour as people in more or less demanding situations. However, I would argue that this again must be set in the contemporary socio-economic context.

For these purposes I have decided on case study method. It has a 'distinct advantage' when "... a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control."<sup>33</sup> The method is intensive<sup>34</sup> to complement the current and reported mostly extensive research. More particularly, case study is what Langrish refers to as a 'biological' alternative and "... looks at how things [in this case, people] survive [behave] in a hostile [complex] environment and how they adapt to change in their environment."<sup>35</sup> and therefore seems well suited to the theorised position of ethical consumers.

In what follows, I review the approaches of four key advocates of case study research. Each takes a significantly different line. Robert Stake reminds us that "[r]esearchers do not step outside their ordinary lives when they observe and interpret and write up the workings of a case."<sup>36</sup> Our task is therefore to set out our case study with generalisations in such an open way as to facilitate the readers own reinterpretation. An *essential* element of his constructivist approach, he argues, is an outline of the researcher's interests.

Conversely, Robert Yin advocates a rigorous structure to minimise bias. We must therefore infer a more positivistic leaning. Additionally, he argues that it is essential the study begins with a theory. This is investigated empirically in the case study bringing multiple source data to bear and then "... the evidence should be presented *neutrally* ..."<sup>37</sup>. Generalisations, he argues, are to be made strictly back to theory.

Langrish's recommendations to researchers are to be altogether more inspirational. He is concerned with the explanatory power that lies in revealing taxonomies. Whilst he accepts that the researcher may to advantage "... have an idea and then try and find what is wrong with it ..." <sup>38</sup> he disagrees with Yin's rejection of grounded theory. In much good science, we are reminded, "... the published idea may have come at the end of the research and be firmly grounded in the experimental data." <sup>39</sup>.

I agree with Alan Thomas, the fourth exponent, that these views are not as conflicting in practice as might at first seem the case. The common implication of the different epistemologies is that the study should be *open to scrutiny*. Whilst Yin might find the researcher's résumé an unnecessary addition he would surely not object to its inclusion. Langrish might find Yin's recommendations to structure too restricting but Yin recognises the need for flexibility, albeit accompanied by redesign, and is fundamentally concerned to avoid drift. Thomas <sup>40</sup> argument, that a reconciliation between realism and constructivism may in practice be achieved by pursuing 'high standards of integrity' in research is important to this study. This is particularly because a notion of how consumers *construct* themselves as ethical, developed in chapters six to eight, is to be considered within a more *realist* concept of the benefits and disbenefits of ethical consumption in chapter nine.

Because my subject presents specific problems discussed above and I have in chapter one developed a number of study questions it is appropriate to design the research to address those issues. Thus to start with a theory is not to preclude the possibility of a rejection of the position. On the other hand I do not share Yin's expectations of impartiality. I shall therefore, follow Langrish's advice in facilitating the reader's interpretation of my position. Otherwise I have tried to adopt Yin's more structured approach not primarily for epistemological reasons but because his specific methodological injunctions, discussed below, predispose the researcher towards rigour. Thomas <sup>41</sup> specifically refers to the value

of competing perspectives 'each taking account of the other' and in this way I hope to have done so.

### **3.4.1. case study theory**

I have identified as a central problem in current research both a workable conceptualisation of the 'ethical consumer' and the level of generality with which it has been approached; numbers have been counted and categorisations proposed. By contrast, "[t]he case study is a specific, complex, functioning thing."<sup>42</sup> The method is appropriate because it offers an opportunity to look in depth at "... something that we do not sufficiently understand and want to ...."<sup>43</sup>, in order to understand "operational links"<sup>44</sup>.

The provisional definition of an ethical consumer adopted in chapter one refers to people who report strong ethical views (as generally measured by market researchers) and are known to have purchased a product on what they would define as a primarily ethical basis. Such a definition seeks to approximate a normative view of ethical consumption but might of course be further informed by the study data.

Although the case study method facilitates, or rather requires, a comprehensive approach to the case subject(s), the depth of the study is clearly dependent upon the forms of data collection within the case study. In relation to my research I have argued that data will be required on supposed decisions, those who have taken the decisions, their immediate context and in a more general sense the wider social conjuncture. Superimposed on this, the notion of consumer inconsistency requires that I employ more clarifying and confirmation procedures than might otherwise be necessary.

### **3.4.2. the multiple case study: examples of ethical consumers**

Although a single case study of an ethical consumer might at this early stage be valuable, if only to offer a contradiction to the perfectly rational consumer, the advantages of some generalisability would, of course, be greatly reduced. Clearly multiple case studies offer a

better opportunity to develop theoretical propositions relating to ethical consumers as discussed below.

In selecting cases as Stake<sup>45</sup> points out we do not aim for the typical but for understanding. Therefore we ask, not which people will be representative of consumers but, which people will help us to *understand*, rather than explain, how ethics and consumer interact. Therefore variety, rather than typicality, is important to my exploratory work. Accessibility, hospitality and convenience also count. Cases which give a "good opportunity to learn"<sup>46</sup> are consequently valuable. In order to achieve sufficient examples for the comparisons I wish to make between the religious, alternative and the information rich, I located ethical consumers in particular 'habitats' as set out in Table 3.2 below.

#### **3.4.3. case study and the application of theory**

Stake differentiates between studies where the issues are 'emic', they arise from the case(s), and those where they are 'etic' and imposed by a predetermined theory. Whereas Langrish implicitly agrees with Stake that these different approaches are legitimate in specific situations, Thomas believes an external agenda is inevitable and Yin *insists* on the application of theory.

Stake<sup>47</sup> would categorise the type of case study I undertook as 'etic', with an externally set agenda and, since there are multiple cases, 'collective instrumental'. The difference of opinion as between the necessary or optional application of theory does not arise in relation to this study but I am inclined to agree with Thomas. Whether or not theoretical propositions are made explicit they will inform all research and as Philip Woodhouse<sup>48</sup> argues, rigour demands that they be acknowledged.

#### **3.4.4. unit of analysis and the boundary problem: embedded decisions**

As Langrish notes, in sociological situations there are "... a plethora of available boundaries ..."<sup>49</sup>. He illustrates the effect of (imaginatively) altering boundaries on a case

study outcome. It may be inferred from this that caution must be exercised particularly when proposing to narrow the case boundary. This is additionally so because it allows greater innovation with classification, in this case, of consumers and of purchase events in contextual situations to maximise insight<sup>50</sup>.

In line with this caution, my unit of analysis was an 'ethical consumer'. Her or his immediate family were considered as among the immediate contextual features. Purchase events, an alternative boundary contender, were considered as embedded cases. This may have had the immediate effect of down playing the role of familial relationships but elements within bounded rationality theory stress interpersonal process in analysis (see 3.8.4 context rationality).

#### **3.4.5. quality of research design**

Yin<sup>51</sup> makes stringent recommendations as to research structures which, he argues, will improve the quality of design. I shall address these in turn:

- Construct validity refers to the establishment of relevant measures of the study concepts. My claim to satisfy this requirement rests on the validity of decision processes and procedures formulated by bounded rationality theorists (see 0) and the concepts borrowed from philosophy: deontology, consequentialism and virtue theory. Both have considerable academic standing and I have argued their significance to this study.
- Internal validity concerns the problem of inference from incomplete knowledge. In this study I accept that knowledge will necessarily be incomplete and analysis always partial. However, as Woodhouse<sup>52</sup> recommends, the establishment of a 'collaborative' relationship between the researcher and researched will reduce the risk of being denied important insights. A chain of evidence establishes the relationship between data and analysis. Pattern matching was used: both 'literal' within cases and 'theoretical' between cases with similarly conditioned purchase

events with a view to rigour. Additionally a process of 'challenge', as recommended by Thomas<sup>53</sup>, was instituted to examine the conclusions.

- External validity refers to the potential for generalisation beyond the cases. Because this is discussed in some detail below it is sufficient here to note that theoretical as opposed to statistical generalisations were made from case studies.
- Reliability is concerned with the notion that the researcher's conclusions are the best possible interpretation of the data. As Yin more positivistically insists, the investigative process and its conclusions should be replicable. Although I do not share the strict view that such replication is possible in complex situations, I developed a protocol following the pilot study. Although expensive in terms of time, multiple sources were a necessary feature of this study. Further, I instituted an informants review<sup>54</sup> or what Stake<sup>55</sup> refers to as 'member checking' where actors [co-researchers] check their part of the account. This occurred at two stages to ensure that the account I produced was recognisable. Such iteration is seen, for instance by Woodhouse<sup>56</sup>, as key to achieving rigour.

Whilst considerable effort was made to structure the enquiry, as Donald Polkinghorne, from a distinctly phenomenological perspective, argues, reliability is ultimately in the dependability of the data<sup>57</sup>. Researchers, he continues, must "rely ... on details of their procedures to evoke an acceptance of the trustworthiness of the data."<sup>58</sup> In the same vein, validity is for Polkinghorne "... a well-grounded conclusion."<sup>59</sup> which relies on its strength of analysis where significance is meaningfulness or importance rather than statistical significance.

#### **3.4.6. generalisations: the status of conclusions**

Some degree of generalisability is important to this study. There are I suggest four levels of generalisation possible from case studies and I relate these to my research:

1. In this study an important aspect of the research is making counter assertions to prevailing assumptions<sup>60</sup>. For instance it should be a relatively pedestrian task to document the sources of information to which 'ethical consumers' refer in any given purchase. This will be important to the extent that it provides an anomalous finding to any generalisation that consumers are perfect maximisers.
2. In addition to Thomas, both Stake and Yin<sup>61</sup> make the point that researchers using case study method are not looking for statistical generalisations. For Yin researchers look for "... 'analytical generalisations' in which previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study."<sup>62</sup> The important distinction for Yin is that any generalisation from this process is made back to theory.
3. More emphasis is placed by Stake<sup>63</sup> than Yin on looking for pattern where the researcher makes 'propositional generalisations' (assertions), for the reader's consideration, and compares these with the data. It is, of course he argues, important to be sceptical and check for data which contradicts your assertions.
4. The validity of the assertions is dependent on the researcher's integrity. Stake goes further to suggest that the reader will modify their own 'natural generalisations' and so will need raw data, the assertions and a picture of researcher to enable her or him to reinterpret where necessary. Stake has a strongly postmodern view of the active reader<sup>64</sup>. Although from a different perspective, facilitating the reinterpreting of data finds echoes in Yin's 'chains of evidence'.<sup>65</sup>

It seems to me that all four generalisations are compatible providing there is transparency, relevant methodological recommendations are followed and assertions are accepted at the readers discretion. Thus at decreasing levels of reliability:

- the first level *challenging assertions* enables me to falsify (or confirm) with considerable certainty say an economic view of the 'ethical consumer';

- at the second level *analytical generalisations* facilitate theory development in the light of empirical evidence;
- at the third level *propositional generalisations* offer the possibility of legitimate researcher speculation, and;
- at the social level the modification of 'natural generalisations' by readers may be facilitated by an open research process.

The extent to which the generalisations can be extended must also be considered. The habitat categories used here were clearly not constructed to sample all types of ethical consumers but to facilitate understanding. Additionally, the assertion that the findings can be generalised to other 'ethical consumers' is trite when such people are categorised as loosely as I and most other researchers have done. However, I present evidence to support the conclusions and shows why alternative conclusions are not as likely, presenting the reasoning by means of which the result has been derived. Such generalisations from examples of ethical consumers as are proposed will take the form of 'likelihood' in respect of a not insignificant population of consumers. And as with the study itself, "... new information or argument may convince scholars that the conclusion is in error or that another conclusion is more likely."<sup>66</sup> Thus I would argue that provisional understandings can be theorised and, importantly, further research signalled. In conclusion Thomas<sup>67</sup> pragmatic statement is instructive:

*Either the case studies will confirm your ideas so that you are more confident about generalizing on their basis or else the case studies will throw doubt on the applicability of your ideas in different circumstances, in which case you should be able to reconceptualize and generalize on the basis of changed or new ideas.*



### 3.4.7. triangulation: research and data

Triangulation, which is of course not for constructivists, should in Stake's opinion be applied sparingly, because it inflates the research data. However, it is essential when it relates to a key or contentious issue in the argument.

He, like Yin, offers four triangulation techniques:

- *data source*: tests if similar findings are made in different data collection circumstances.
- *investigator*: asks are similar interpretations reported by another researcher<sup>68</sup>?
- *theory*: addresses the data from other perspectives through a researcher(s) panel to test whether these offer similar interpretations.
- *methodological*: applies another method to the proposition to seek confirmation or contradiction of the conclusions.

Yin argues that the wide use of multi-source data is necessary to strengthen the conclusions. This would especially be the case where, borrowing Polkinghorne's words, "... the researcher may have cause to suspect that a person's story is false and cannot be relied on for establishing an event."<sup>69</sup> A particular problem of this study, the supposed words / deeds inconsistency, demanded the wide use of triangulation in relation to data sources.

Some investigator triangulation was instigated with the initial consumer narratives. The narrative was separately categorised by another academic and the compared results are set out in the next chapter.

This study did not command sufficient attention, and did not have sufficient import to warrant deliberation by a research panel. However, a number of preliminary presentations were made of parts of the work and this peer review acted as expected to modify my thinking. Again these are referred to in the following chapter.

Although case study methodology was used here there are currently further extensive and focus group studies under way using different theoretical propositions. It has been made clear above that this study is intended as a *contribution* to understanding and every effort will be made to consider alternative views of ethical consumption.

### **3.5. research method: data collection**

Based on the requirements set out above I used the following data collection methods.

Potential co-researchers were contacted in specific 'habitats'. An introductory letter gave a note on what was expected of a co-researcher. The data collection methods are shown in Table 3.1 and are divided into nine sections relating to the nature of each.

**Table 3.1 data collection methods**

<i>collection methods</i>	<i>data</i>
questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consumer and ethical reported attitudes to environmental, animal welfare and other ethical concerns</li> <li>• personal factual details</li> </ul>
self-report narratives recorded by co-researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• successful 'ethical' purchases</li> <li>• partially successful 'ethical' purchases</li> <li>• unsuccessful 'ethical' purchases</li> <li>• purchases where 'ethical' issues did not intrude</li> </ul>
documentary (receipts collected prior to interview others during interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receipts collected by co-researchers</li> <li>• brochures</li> <li>• magazines, journals, book collection</li> <li>• co-researcher photographs</li> <li>• record of television watching and radio listening</li> </ul>
semi-structured interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• progressing questions from data collected</li> <li>• quasi verbal protocols</li> </ul>
photographs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addressing what is important in the co-researchers' life</li> <li>• 'ethical' purchases in context</li> <li>• main rooms of home</li> <li>• external home and, if appropriate, car(s)</li> </ul>
unstructured interview / incidental information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unsolicited comments</li> </ul>
records of past purchases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consumer durables purchased in the last five years</li> <li>• services purchased recently/regularly</li> </ul>
post-empirical research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using <i>Ethical Consumer</i> and other sources to locate possibilities and alternative products and services and/or verify co-researchers' accounts</li> </ul>
account iterations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accounts of co-researchers fed back at two stages</li> </ul>

Examples of the actual data collection documentation and detailed discussion of collection methods are in chapter four. As Thomas<sup>70</sup> notes such a wide range of methods necessarily 'combine several skills'. Each of these data collection methods requires

general discussion. Unlike reductionism where studies may employ a single methodology, refined and discussed in some detail, one of the costs of generalism is that particular attention can rarely be given to all methods. More detailed discussion is given here to the collection of narrative because of its central importance.

### **3.5.1. questionnaire**

The questionnaire is usually the tool of the extensive researcher. Here the tool had three purposes. The first was to attract the attention of would be co-researchers and to indicate the nature of the enquiry. In this sense it sets the agenda to the normative notion of the ethical consumer. The second was to gather factual information about the co-researcher: age, sex, income etc. The third was to survey their attitudes in much the same way as would a market researcher.

### **3.5.2. self-report narratives of purchases**

During the co-researchers' period of collecting receipts they were invited to record stories of purchase events on self-recorded audio tapes. Such recording of narratives, according to Polkinghorne<sup>71</sup>, is not an unusual form of investigation. However, the status of narrative itself in this study requires some clarification and I will do this in my discussion of interviews (3.5.4).

I selected this method for collecting stories of purchases primarily in order to obviate a preliminary interview. Fred Lockwood<sup>72</sup> reports a successful use of self-recorded audio tapes with course feedback from Open University students. He claims a comparable quality and amount of data to interview methods for a saving in time and cost.

More importantly for this study he reported that all but one respondent adopted a relaxed, informal, conversational style. He believes that "... the solitary conditions under which the tapes were recorded appeared to encourage a degree of openness and frankness that was less apparent in face to face interviews."<sup>73</sup> Such a condition would

clearly have a significant advantage where socially desirability responses were thought probable and superficiality of response has been predicted<sup>74</sup>.

He offers the following further methodological and practical advantages:

- the respondent (co-researcher) may enter data when, possibly at the time of the event, and where, depending on the mobility of the equipment, s/he wishes;
- responses are based on consistent instructions and questions;
- the method obviates concerns of researcher bias, and;
- provides a permanent record without memory difficulties or intrusive writing during interviews.

Lockwood<sup>75</sup> did not find technical disadvantages with self-recorded audio tapes, all transcribed well, but response rate was a problem. Although Lockwood's lowest reported voluntary rate of return was 53% this was not significantly poorer than that expected from either a questionnaire or the failure to secure an agreed interview.

Self-recorded audio tapes, as a substitute to one interview, appear to offer the possibility of good quality data and some commencement of solidarity building through shared confidences. Although Lockwood stresses the importance of clear instructions and questions he notes that students appeared to follow them well<sup>76</sup>. The intrusion of peripheral issues, those not called for in the instructions, was not seen as significant and indeed gave some useful insights<sup>77</sup>.

However, there are of course problems with asking people to recall decisions in this way. Carroll & Johnson<sup>78</sup> suggest that a high quality of self-reports of decisions can be achieved where:

1. the decisions are close in time to the recall;
2. procedure eliciting recall is similar to original situation;

3. the original event has established a strong memory by being important, attracting curious attention or being repeated;
4. the order in which the questions are asked facilitates correct recall, and;
5. the respondent is motivated to be truthful, not simply helpful.

In accordance with this I assume that ethical consumption, by its nature, establishes a strong memory. Additionally I asked for decisions of no more than a year ago to be included but supplemented with decisions made in the past month and recorded by receipts. It is accepted however that the different response conditions and order of questions represents a disadvantage in the recall process.

Audio-narratives were not expected on their own to be sufficient. Lockwood<sup>79</sup> notes that there were times in his study when confirmation of the data on self-recorded audio tapes would have been useful. In the present study confirmation and exploration are essential. He acknowledges that interviews and self-recorded audio tapes complemented each other<sup>80</sup>. Thus interviews should develop and explore the events outlined in the taped narratives in such a way that "... interviewing is a discourse [and] It is the responsibility of researchers to establish a free flow of information from participants and to describe fully how it was accomplished ..."<sup>81</sup>. For this reason semi-structured interviews were proposed.

### **3.5.3. receipts as records of purchases**

Co-researchers were asked to collect day to day purchase receipts over a period of one month and to request receipts where none was offered. This was to achieve as complete a record of purchases as possible for the first stage of my analysis and data triangulation with narratives. Additionally it was intended to form a component in the co-researchers' process of self-examination. Marking purchases subjectively as 'ethical' or otherwise was expected to facilitate understanding of both the nature of the co-researchers' belief and extent of consumer engagement.

I know of no previous use of this method. However, in the light of Carroll & Johnson's critique of decision recall research discussed above I thought it prudent to locate some discussions in recent, recorded purchase events.

#### **3.5.4. semi-structured interview and the use of narrative in research**

Although case study is likely to incorporate many methods, "semi-structured interviews [...] usually form a big part of any case study investigation"<sup>82</sup>. This is because such interviews allow the researcher and co-researcher to 'probe' the narrative and other data further. "The purpose of descriptive narrative research ... [is to produce] ... a document describing the narratives held in or below awareness ..." and in that story, the teller claims self-representation<sup>83</sup>. In this sense Polkinghorne<sup>84</sup> says:

*The research report itself is not simply the presentation of the story of some person or organisation. It is an argued essay that conforms to the rules of a scholarly presentation. Alternative narratives and interpretations are recognised, and evidence from the interview text is used to argue for the conclusion the researcher has reached. The theme or point of the story is not usually directly presented by the text, for it requires inference and interpretation on the researcher's part. Like formal science research, descriptive narrative research involves detection, selection, and interpretation of data, which in narrative is the text of the interview (and the common cultural presuppositions necessary for understanding it). The transcripts of interview materials must be available to other researchers so that they can follow the researcher's move from data to interpretation.*

This epistemological narrative "... recognises ... something is done in order to accomplish a preconditioned aim ..." <sup>85</sup>

Narrative, Polkinghorne<sup>86</sup> says, is retrospective rather than predictive and is therefore applicable to the task of understanding. "[N]arrative explanations are genuinely explanatory for they can answer the question of why something has happened."; they

seek to explain rather than elicit laws; it is a "... retrospective gathering of events into an account that makes the ending *reasonable* and believable."<sup>87</sup> However, academics from a wide range of perspectives agree that not any narrative will suffice<sup>88</sup>. The explanation must meet some conditions and it is for this reason that triangulation with receipt data and the questionnaire will be necessary.

Alternatively, for example, from a positivistic viewpoint, Robert Fisher<sup>89</sup> concerns himself with 'social desirability bias'. He worries that respondents might say what they think is socially expected rather than the 'truth'. In parallel to the data triangulation it is intended, as Polkinghorne<sup>90</sup> recommends, to build a context of solidarity such that both researcher and co-researcher are engaged in a process of trying to understand important aspects of their lives. In this way the interviewee should feel less need to say what is merely socially desirable.

In accord with this notion of 'detective work' I had decided that decision making processes and procedures should be clarified and further explored in semi-structured interviews using open ended questions. Variations on standard questions were based on data drawn from the questionnaire, narratives and receipts. The questions set out and justified in the next chapter include clarification of factual matters, an enquiry into the scope of each co-researcher's ethical consumption, a main section about decisions they had reported and their philosophy as an ethical consumer, the origins of their ethical consumption, the perceived complexity of the issues and any communications they have about ethical consumption. Additionally I asked about other activities they consider important and possible changes in lifestyle. As a quasi-verbal protocol co-researchers were asked how they would go about hypothetical<sup>91</sup> purchases that I had assessed from the previous data to be of some interest to them. Their responses were of course subject to the same challenge to inconsistency from methodological and analytical triangulation as other answers.

In accordance with Langrish's recommendation these interviews were not tape recorded. Records were made immediately following the event and word processed copies sent to the co-researcher for confirmation, comment and /or correction.

#### **3.5.5. other documentary evidence**

Support documentation is important. In cases where a co-researcher referred to a particular documentary source, say a magazine or book, as contributing to decision making I endeavoured, for data triangulation, to get confirmation or sight of a copy.

#### **3.5.6. photographs**

I decided to take judiciously chosen photographs order to quickly and effectively give some incontrovertible physical descriptions. In terms of general lifestyle, informative photographs of a room, home and surroundings would seemed invaluable. However, I did not photograph the co-researchers themselves in order to preserve anonymity.

#### **3.5.7. unstructured interview / incidental information**

I noted incidental information and included it as data. For instance, I used my lunch with Bob at a local vegetarian café he had suggested to confirm his choice of eating venue.

#### **3.5.8. records of passed purchases**

Following the semi-structured interview I left forms with my co-researchers on which to record previous purchases of consumer durables and regular services. Such purchases could be influenced by ethical concerns but the completed forms also gave some insight into the co-researchers' material possessions.

#### **3.5.9. post-empirical research**

Any factual points in doubt following the field work were checked. For example I telephoned the Ethical Consumer magazine to establish the change in ownership of the Ecover company and Which? (Consumers' Association) magazine for copies of their publications on Zanussi white goods.



### 3.5.10. account iterations

Polkinghorne<sup>92</sup> commends the narrative process from a more constructivist position than the present study. However, his conceptualisation of the role of narrative is useful here.

*The purpose of descriptive research is to present the narrative schemes the storyteller has intended. Information about the actions that were undertaken on the basis of the story supports the researcher's claim that the story allows the person to order and organise his/ her experience.*

Two considerations arise from accepting, as I do, that co-researchers will 'order and organise' experience. One is that post-hoc order may in a real sense be a misrepresentation and the second is that I may misrepresent co-researchers.

A key concern of this study was to distinguish between rational approaches some or all of which would be decision making short-cuts. If for example a co-researcher were to reconstructed *imitation*, copying what others have done, into a *perfectly rational search* for the purposes of the study this would need to be revealed. Triangulation with data from the interview and document search, in this case, should reveal a lack of relevant literature and a paucity of search situations (say shops visited, informants etc.).

On the other hand since I inevitably have limited information (if rather more than is usual) upon which to base my portrayal of co-researchers, there may be factual or interpretative statements with which the co-researcher is unhappy.

Polkinghorne<sup>93</sup> expresses this thus:

*The elimination of other possible narrative plots that are less effective than the proposed story in accounting for the person's actions supports the correctness of the researcher's account. The thesis of the research report is that the offered description accurately represents the operating stories that people or groups use to understand the temporal connections between the events they have experienced and to account for their own and others' motives, reasons, expectations, and memories. The report also recognises how these stories have functioned (or failed to function) to order the events under consideration into a coherent and unified experience.*

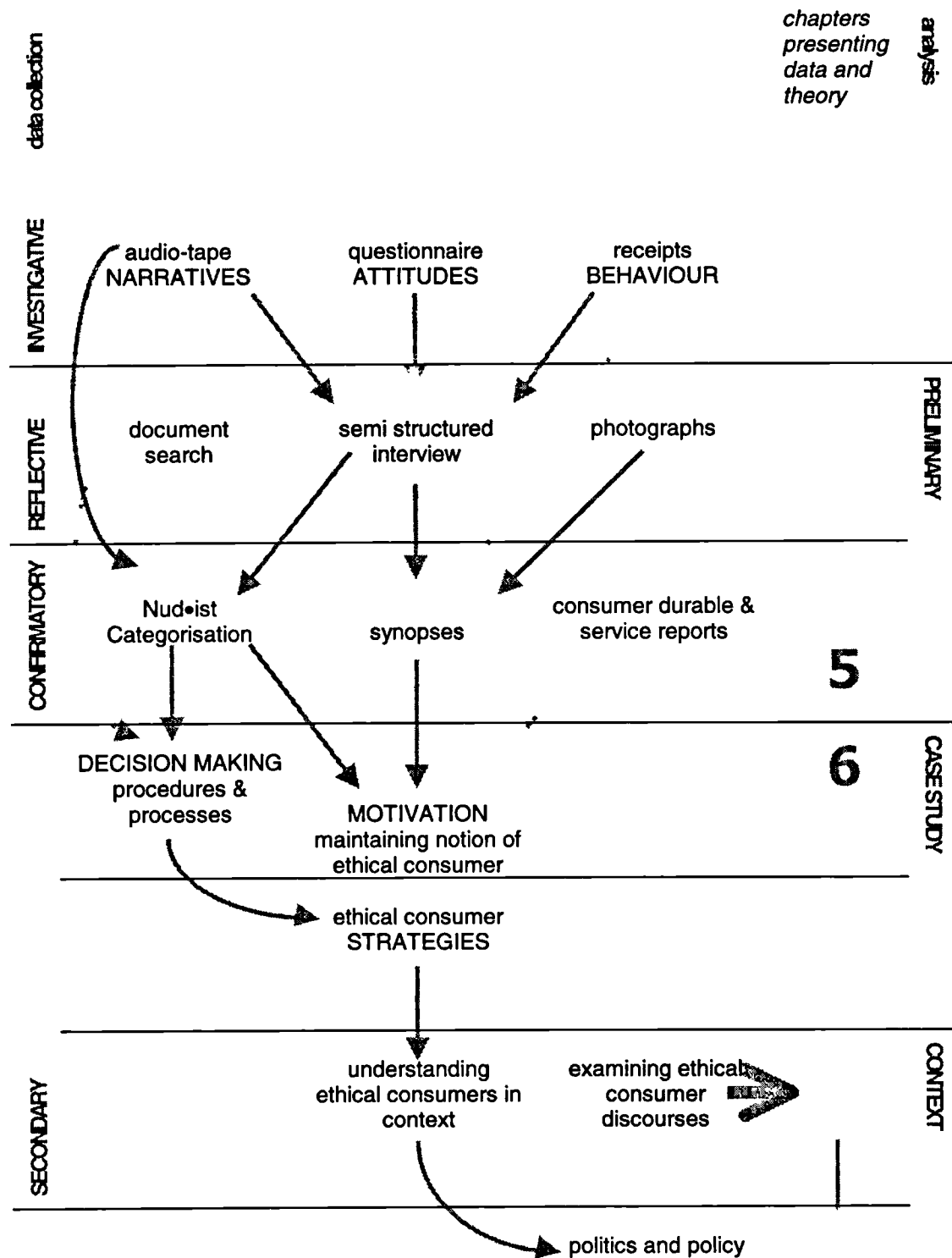
It is for these reasons that a process of iteration was proposed. This 'member checking' took place twice to ensure development of the narrative was mutual. Thus the research in turns promoted processes where co-researchers ordered and presented their narratives and where I interpreted, challenged and represented them. The last check, of my synopsis, was at as late a stage as I considered practicable.

### **3.6. the structure of the research**

Having set out my data collection methods I want to explain how these link together and form the basis of my analysis. I represent this process graphically in Figure 3.1 showing stages both of data collection and analysis.

In the investigative stage of data collection, each co-researcher filled in my questionnaire, recorded narratives and collected receipts. I transcribed the audio-taped narratives. Along with my analysis of the receipts and the questionnaire, this provided the basis on which I formulated my questions for the semi-structured interview. I refer to this second stage as reflective for two reasons. Firstly, I had made a preliminary analysis to prepare for the interview and secondly, my co-researchers' and I further considered their narratives, reported attitudes and behaviour in the interview.

Figure 3.1 structure of the research



Note: the shaded areas indicate main data collection methods

chapter number

I conducted the semi-structured interviews in my co-researchers' homes and records of the meeting were subsequently agreed with them. I collected further data at this point in the form of photographs and copies of any documents referred to by my co-researchers'. Following each interview I left forms with them to record recent purchases of consumer durables and regular purchases of services.

At this point I wrote a synopsis of each case. Co-researchers' were sent a copy and invited to comment. For obvious reasons I have referred to this as confirmatory data collection. The revised synopses, along with a report of co-researchers' attitudes form the basis of my report in chapter five.

All of the word processed data (narratives and records of interviews) were 'introduced' to QSR Nud•ist to facilitate my case study analysis. These analyses of decision-making and motivation form the basis of chapters six and seven respectively. Drawing on both these, chapter eight presents the core of my thesis: my key conclusions.

In the final stage of my study I collected (mostly) secondary data: expert reports and opinion. I used this to set a wider context within which to understand my study conclusions. This contextual work is presented in the final two chapters.

### **3.7. structuring the analysis**

I employed some formalised methods in my analysis. These not only improved my ability to access and refer to data but also functioned as a discipline.

#### **3.7.1. QSR Nud•ist database**

All word-processed data: narratives, semi-structured interviews and informal exchanges, were stored on a Nud•ist database. This software allows a wide range of functions in sorting, ordering and arranging qualitative data. A category structure was developed following the decision processes and procedures derived from bounded rationality and philosophy, and is set out in the following chapter. Each category was assigned a 'node' in the database where relevant text was stored. Nud•ist additionally facilitates 'trails of

evidence' because each document, each categorised text unit and decision node may be referenced precisely.

### **3.7.2. trails of evidence**

In accordance with Yin's recommendation, clear trails of evidence were set up to indicate relationships between analysis and data. This was particularly useful for chapters six and seven where I use data in direct analysis to establish the key themes of the thesis. The format for this is set out in the next chapter.

### **3.8. *borrowing tools from bounded rationality***

I borrow specific terms from bounded rationality to structure the enquiry. These refer to decision making deliberate processes and systematic procedures. With both the co-researcher's narrative documents and reports of semi-structured interviews I categorised evidence that a particular decision might have resulted from one or more of these processes and procedures. By the use of the qualitative database (see 3.7.1) this allowed me to access narrative categorised at individual nodes for one or any selection of co-researchers or alternatively a selection of decisions for one individual.

It was not intended, however, that the use of these categories would restrict the research. By this I mean that the terms may have become more or less valid or change their nature as I move towards a more contextualised study; I was not so committed to them that I could not conceive change. Additionally it should be noted that they are not necessarily as is sometimes the case viewed as competing explanations, rather as complementary. The terms I relate here are, as discussed above, based on March's review of the insights of bounded rationality. It is for the above reasons that I have deliberately collected these uncritically both from March's calculative and systemic rationalities. The schema for recognition are set out in the following chapter.

### **3.8.1. searching and satisficing**

Satisficing is the prime deliberative rationality concept introduced by Simon. It admits search with some less rigid concept of preference but acknowledges the limits of attention and, as an alternative to maximisation, stresses the notion of settling for the first acceptable alternative.

### **3.8.2. imitation**

Imitation, the first of the systematic rationalities presented here, says March<sup>94</sup> is the facility “.... by which we substitute the guesses of someone else for our own.” Hence “[t]he superiority of imitation depends in general, on the relative competence of actor and expert and the extent to which intelligent action is reproducible but not comprehensible.”

### **3.8.3. intuition**

March<sup>95</sup> explains intuition as the means “.... by which we substitute one guess for two ....”. The guesses to which March refers are firstly about the effects of our chosen action and secondly about our preferred outcome as those consequences unfold. In order to understand this it is necessary to note that, within bounded rationality unlike neo-classical economy, preferences are not presumed to be fixed.

### **3.8.4. context rationality**

Consumers are constrained in decision making by ‘other claims’<sup>96</sup>. The consideration or disregard, for instance of family relations, carries advantages or costs. It may seem rational to take these into account or even allow them to determine choice.

### **3.8.5. process rationality**

“Ideas of process rationality emphasise the extent to which decisions find their sense in the attributes of the decision process, rather than the attributes of decision outcomes.”

Thus March<sup>97</sup> says:

*" .... [t]hey explore those significant human pleasures (and pains) found in the ways we act while making decisions, and in the symbolic content of the idea and procedures of choice. Explicit outcomes are viewed as secondary and decision making becomes sensible through the intelligence of the way it is orchestrated."*

### **3.8.6. conventional rule**

March identifies rule following at two levels. The first ".... claims to capture the intelligence of survival over long histories of experience more relevant than that susceptible to immediate calculation ...." Typical of these would be a variation of the 'golden rule': do as you would be done by.

### **3.8.7. heuristics**

The second are rules relating specifically to the problems faced by, in this case, 'ethical' consumers. They are 'domain specific'. In this sense these 'rules' or guides may be considered esoteric. Ethical consumer heuristics are valuable to the extent they capture the accumulated wisdom of group practice.

### **3.8.8. adaptive rationality**

Learned behaviour is valuable to the extent that it captures the accumulated wisdom of the individual's practice and therefore, March<sup>98</sup> observes "permits the management of considerable experiential information". Such a concept is taken here as similar to 'habit' where behaviour that is deemed sufficiently successful is continued. For the purposes of this study, the two will be considered together.

Other possible candidates for inclusion have been omitted. 'Selected rationality' and 'game rationality' are more applicable to organisational analysis and in this study the insights are more appropriately understood within a broadly conceived context rationality.

### **3.9. *exploration and theoretical propositions***

Underlying the study is an exploration of ethical consumers in considerably more depth than has previously been intended or realised. To achieve this I need a *variety* of examples of ethical consumers and good opportunities to understand their decision making and philosophy. This understanding must be situated in a broader context of their lives. The resulting descriptions of ethical consumers are not intended to be exhaustive of the 'population'.

However, I am additionally intending to draw here on previous empirical and theoretical work to set up propositions within which to examine decision making. Two pieces of work present themselves and I shall present these in turn. Stitts "[f]indings indicated that consumers with religious ties tended to think more deontologically than their counterparts with no religious ties."<sup>99</sup>. Although carried out in the USA this finding of a differential between secular and religious decision making is directly related by Stitts to ethical consumers and is therefore an appropriate basis upon which to explore difference. For my data to be consistent with Stitts findings I should discern significantly different decision making practices between religious and other ethical consumers.

Secondly, the position of information within the theory of bounded rationality is significantly different to that postulated by perfect rationality theorists. For instance, March notes that "[i]nformation that is ostensibly gathered for a decision is often ignored. Individuals often fight for the right to participate in a decision process, but then do not exercise the right." The call for information is a significant element in contemporary consumer activism. However, "... we sometimes see decision making perversely resistant to advice and information." and this is, March argues, partly because "[t]he competition for reputations among decision makers stimulates the overproduction of information."<sup>100</sup> To explore this concept the study includes examples of ethical consumers who have access to considerable informational resources. They will be likely for instance to be



experienced in locating information, have regular access to the internet and academic or research libraries and be cognisant with some relevant current debates.

I proposed three basic theoretical propositions. These were that there would be:

1. similarities in decision making among ethical consumers with significant conventional religious affiliations, for instance Christians who commit regular time to their church;
2. discernible differences in decision making between these and other ethical consumers and;
3. no necessary similarities between ethical consumers because they may be considered 'information rich'.

To explore these I needed three categories of examples. The are set out in Table 3.2. I have added some speculative details concerning the decision making and philosophy I would expect examples in these categories to exhibit.

Clearly some who buy from 'alternative' venues are likely to have religious affiliations and these, in terms of decision making, would, of course, take precedence in my ascription of a category. Similarly the information rich might or might not have religious affiliations.

To render categories amenable to literal replication Thomas<sup>101</sup> notes that at least two cases are required in each. However, the opportunity for pattern matching is proportionately so much greater with three cases that I considered this to be the minimum: three cases by three categories. Such a minimum number of varied cases was also considered necessary to enable the exploratory approach.

**Table 3.2 habitat categories**

<i>study category</i>	<i>contact habitat</i>	<i>expected philosophy</i>	<i>expected decision processes and procedures</i>
<b>'alternative' ethical consumer</b>	an 'alternative' establishment such as a vegetarian café, wholefood shop etc.	Adopts a lifestyle which to a greater or lesser extent politically rejects consumer capitalism. Ethical consumption is predominantly concerned with consequences.	may search for information and <i>satisfice</i> but is as likely to employ <i>domain specific heuristic</i> and where considerable expertise has developed, <i>intuition</i>
<b>'religious' ethical consumer</b>	a church or other religious establishment and/or religion inspired fair trade group.	The 'religious' ethical consumer subscribe to well established deontological ethical formulations which allow them to make decisions relatively efficiently.	deploys appropriate <i>generalised rules</i> and <i>imitation</i> of approved practices
<b>'information rich' ethical consumer</b>	an academic establishment in a discipline, such as environment, human geography, world development etc.	Information rich ethical consumer may be immersed in the issues which relate to 'ethics' and consumerism but their secular political or religious philosophy rather than access to information should determine their decision making.	indeterminate, because there should be no necessary connection between the access to information and the decision making process

### **3.10. summary of epistemology and methodology:**

I have argued in this chapter that a frame of systematic decision procedure and/or deliberative decision making processes taken from the 'early' insights of bounded rationality furnishes a valuable tool appropriate to the examination of ethical consumers: search 'satisficing', imitation, intuition, context and process rationality, rule and heuristic deployment and adaptive rationality. The familiar conceptualisations of philosophy were argued to be appropriate to understanding co-researchers' rationale: virtue, consequentialism and deontology. I have preferred a conventional multiple case study methodology to contextualise and reveal the boundaries and rationale of the decisions. Theoretical differences, based on established work, were recalled to underpin appropriate categories of ethical consumers: 'alternative', 'religious' and 'information rich'.

Excepting the pilot study, the individuals contributing to this study were self-selecting 'ethical consumers' located in three appropriate 'habitats'. Theoretical selections were made to construct the multi-case categories. The methods were designed to examine decision making but also influences, habits, concepts of ethical consuming and co-researchers' other interests. Data collection methods were designed to be used cumulatively to build a consumer narrative: questionnaire, receipt collection and self-recorded audio narratives followed by a semi-structured interview, photographs, a document search, self-report of purchases of consumer durables and service, and post-empirical research. Considerable triangulation of findings was therefore made possible. Validity was strengthened by two co-researcher account iterations.

The research was constructed to facilitate the subjective construction of a narrative that is seen as the most useful addition to current, mostly extensive, research around the phenomenon of ethical consumerism. However, an entirely constructivist perspective is not proposed and at the broader social level my case study conclusions are re-examined within a normative concept of ethical consumption.

#### references and notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mishler cited in Polkinghorne (1988), p166.

<sup>2</sup> Woodhouse (1998), p135.

<sup>3</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p174.

<sup>4</sup> Dembkoski & Hanmer-Lloyd (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Durning (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Singer (1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Ölander and Thøgersen (1995), p347 for a developed argument in favour of consumer research.

<sup>8</sup> Boudon (1992), p127.

<sup>9</sup> Lane, Malerba, Maxfield & Orsenigo (1996).

<sup>10</sup> Simon (1992), p106.

<sup>11</sup> Axelrod (1984).

<sup>12</sup> Coleman (1991).

<sup>13</sup> March (1994), p165.

<sup>14</sup> Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986), p36.

<sup>15</sup> March (1978), p588.

<sup>16</sup> Midgley (1994), p43.

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- <sup>17</sup> Leys (1966), p44.
- <sup>18</sup> March (1978), p591.
- <sup>19</sup> Simon (1955).
- <sup>20</sup> See chapter two.
- <sup>21</sup> Simon (1992).
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p95.
- <sup>23</sup> Carroll & Johnson (1990), pp87-88.
- <sup>24</sup> Boudon (1992), p129.
- <sup>25</sup> Dahlbäck (1995).
- <sup>26</sup> Boudon (1992), p130.
- <sup>27</sup> Griffiths (1995), p297.
- <sup>28</sup> Hare (1993).
- <sup>29</sup> Marris (1992).
- <sup>30</sup> Hare (1993b).
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Stitts (1992).
- <sup>33</sup> Both Yin (1994), p9, and Thomas (1998) make this point.
- <sup>34</sup> Thomas (1998) for instance distinguishes case study as 'intensive'.
- <sup>35</sup> Langrish (1993), p6.
- <sup>36</sup> Stake (1995), p135.
- <sup>37</sup> Yin (1994), p150 (*my emphasis*).
- <sup>38</sup> Langrish (1993), p10.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas & Chataway (1998), p339.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Stake (1995), p2.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p133.
- <sup>44</sup> Yin (1994).
- <sup>45</sup> Stake (1995).
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p37/8 & 6/57.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Woodhouse (1998), p145.
- <sup>49</sup> Langrish (1993), p3.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p4.
- <sup>51</sup> Yin (1994).
- <sup>52</sup> Woodhouse (1998).
- <sup>53</sup> Thomas (1998), p323 makes challenge a prime recommendation.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p35.
- <sup>55</sup> Stake (1995).
- <sup>56</sup> Woodhouse (1998).
- <sup>57</sup> Polkinghorne (1988).
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p177.

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- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p175.
- <sup>60</sup> See Stake (1995), p8.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., Yin (1994) and Thomas (1998).
- <sup>62</sup> Yin (1994), p34.
- <sup>63</sup> Stake (1995).
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., p44/5.
- <sup>65</sup> Yin (1994), p31.
- <sup>66</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p176.
- <sup>67</sup> Thomas (1998), p323.
- <sup>68</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p176.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p174.
- <sup>70</sup> Thomas (1998).
- <sup>71</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p170.
- <sup>72</sup> Lockwood (1992).
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., p17.
- <sup>74</sup> In telephone conversations with Tracey Bedford at UCL and Georgetown University in USA, superficiality of response has been cited as the basic problem in their research into 'ethical consumers'.
- <sup>75</sup> Lockwood (1992), p12.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp11&17.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., p12.
- <sup>78</sup> Carroll & Johnson (1990).
- <sup>79</sup> Lockwood (1992).
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., p17.
- <sup>81</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p177.
- <sup>82</sup> Thomas (1998), p329.
- <sup>83</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p165.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., p196.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., p172.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., p171.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., p171 (*my emphasis*).
- <sup>88</sup> Thomas (1998) illustrates this point from within a constructionist perspective.
- <sup>89</sup> Fisher (1993), p303-315.
- <sup>90</sup> Polkinghorne (1988), p164.
- <sup>91</sup> Woodhouse (1998), p141.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p196.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., p169.
- <sup>94</sup> March (1978), p604.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., p592.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., p592.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., p593.
- <sup>99</sup> Stitts (1992), p90.

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<sup>100</sup> March (1994), (first quote on p170 and subsequent ones on p173).

<sup>101</sup> Thomas (1998), p324.

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## 4. research design, field work and analysis

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This chapter reports the research design, the pilot study with its implications and developments, how the fieldwork was carried out and the processes of analysis. The sequencing is more or less chronological. I begin with the process of questioning my epistemology and end explaining the deductive processes. Copies of communications with co-researchers: instructions, advice etc., are in the thesis appendix. My own analytical tools are distributed in the text as tables and figures.

### 4.1. *questioning the epistemology: a seminar presentation*

Although it was not possible to triangulate theory using a panel of researchers I presented the theoretical approach of bounded rationality in a seminar at the Open University before the pilot study was commenced. The following *questions* were raised in the seminar. I have set out my responses. The fact that I have given succinct and clear answers here should not be taken to imply that there was no debate.

1. *Was the study gender blind particularly with regard to time constraints?*

No, I recognised the difference highlighted in Burgess *et al.*'s (see chapter two) study of consumers relating to environmental problems suggesting women concentrate on specific, local, personal problems while men talk in abstract, generalised, global terms. I selected equal numbers of women and men as co-researchers but recognised that, as Tracey Bedford had found, men rarely took responsibility for many purchase decisions. The question of time constraints (attention) is specifically recognised in the theory of *bounded rationality* which informs the study. I had covered the matter of attention constraints in the seminar. The probability that women often have more responsibilities and therefore less disposable time was therefore integral to the study.

2. *Was the theory predetermining the result? Would it not be better to allow the theory to develop from the data?*

I subscribe to the view that all research is motivated by some preconceived ideas whether the perspective is made explicit or not. In so far as there is a choice it must be between a lesser or a greater development of theory. There are arguments for one or the other depending on circumstances. In this case the dominant theory, neo-classical economics, has served us poorly and there seems good reason for articulating an alternative.

3. *Since I was concerned to study decision making, was my approach simply an action theory model, where individuals are seen as acting more-or-less independently? Had I considered the heuristics and rules as normative?*

Although my theory postulates 'ethical consumers' as rational decision makers, it should not be confused with 'rational choice theory' as an individualist project. I have stressed the importance of seeing humans as social beings influencing and being influenced by a socially constructed morality rather than exhibiting unaccountable preferences. I referred to Griffiths'<sup>1</sup> argument in respect to the agency / structure debate, and quote:

*An individual confronted with the necessity of behavioral choice always finds himself or herself in a specific situation that .... is structured in important part by the prevailing state of the social system - in particular, its behavioral rules, as these are operative at the individual level. For a particular individual in a specific situation these rules are givens of which he or she must take account.*



*This is not to say that they determine behavior in a mechanistic sense: human beings are not perfectly programmed decision-making robots, and even if they were, there are other features of the structural situation than rules [such as economic] with which they have to be concerned. But the rules of the social system - and especially the rules that constitute the most fundamental institutions - are, on the social control approach, assumed to have an important influence on behavior; they account for the characteristically different patterns of behavior in different social systems.*

Whilst the points raised to some extent replicate those considered in the previous chapter, I think their rehearsal here serves to clarify the study's epistemological pluralism. Thus although I would argue that *bounded rationality is an appropriate frame* within which to consider ethical consumers, I would welcome an alternative, say normative approach. Additionally, although I do not specifically address the gender divide, the frame is inclusive in the sense that it attends to issues of differential demands on attention. And I would reiterate my agreement with the view that it is not possible to define and address a phenomenon free from preconception. In such circumstance I believe it preferable to make that perspective explicit.

#### **4.2. piloting the study**

The data collection processes were tried out on four pilot cases: Janice, Louise, Phil and Bob. Three of these were subsequently incorporated as examples of ethical consumers. Janice was the first to be asked to take part in the study. I met her incidentally to the study and in the course of conversation she started telling me about her involvement in the promotion of fair traded products. Louise, as Janice, is involved in a church local to where I live whereas I had previously met Bob through a wholefood cooperative. I had known Phil for considerably longer than the others and although I was aware of his political commitment to social justice I had no idea about his (ethical) consumption. I was

primarily concerned at this stage to locate willing participants of whom I had sufficient but little previous knowledge.

#### **4.2.1. how should the pilot study be judged?**

I worked through the data collection methods set out in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 with those who agreed to pilot my study. The following is my evaluation of the process.

1. *On a practical level was there a sufficient take-up and return rate?* Here three out of four interested parties completed the study; I was unable to interest Phil sufficiently in responding without undue persistence. If that were repeated in the main study I would need to make initial contact with at least four people in each habitat category and make some additional allowance for gendered selection. Although the take-up rate from absolute 'cold calling' may be less predictable the accomplishment of quite demanding tasks in the pilot study was encouraging. I found it difficult to keep in contact during the month of receipt collecting. Having little pretext on which to telephone co-researchers, this meant that I didn't know how, or if, data collection was progressing and when to expect a return.
2. *At the technical level, did the data collection 'instruments' work?* Given a number of corrections and alterations detailed below all the methods of data collection were carried out. I had intended to try to construct a mind map/rich picture to aid broad understanding. After a couple of hours interview, however, it seemed too much effort through which to put co-researchers. Audio-tape transcriptions varied considerably in length as Table 4.1 shows. Louise, considering herself to be new to ethical consumption, nevertheless had much to say that I considered valuable. Interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours with up to a further two hours depending on the length of very interesting informal chatting. Expectations of being able to recall semi-structured interviews from the briefest of notes were vindicated. The length of interview reports is also given in Table 4.1 and each was approved by the co-researcher as a satisfactory rendering.
3. *At the lowest analytical level, were the data sufficient to generate a synopsis of each case?* I developed synopses for the three completed cases but it was not until later that it was finally agreed to send these to co-researchers for approval and correction. However I didn't feel unduly daunted by the prospect of compiling the further synopses given the scope and depth of data I was generating.

4. *Did the data triangulate as expected?* By the end of the pilot study I considered that less triangulation than originally expected would be necessary to address the words / deeds inconsistency. Certainly in terms of building towards a coherent picture and ensuring a broad base of resources when analysing and writing up cases which are clouded by time, the multiple data proved valuable.
5. *Did each method contribute to the case or are some superfluous?* In some case studies specific methods may seem superfluous. In the case of Louise, for instance, the receipts show no 'ethical purchases'. However, this provides the basis in the semi-structured interviews both for questioning this apparent inconsistency with her narrative and explaining the purchase of certain products for which receipts existed.  

I seemed to be able to make little direct use of the consumer durable and service reports. On the other hand they provided specific confirmation of important findings: these included the extent to which Louise purchased second-hand goods, Bob's price conscious pursuit of quality and June's occasional environmental considerations. These might or might not be used directly in the analysis but provided a further reference should other data prove ambiguous.
6. *Did the data facilitate analysis of the bounded rational conditions theorised?* QSR Nud•ist was not initially used for pilot study data. Without a complete process of analysis it was difficult to assess the quality of data. However, categorisation had proved possible and some tentative insights, such as the seemingly directive nature of some religious ethical consumer discourse, were possible.
7. *Did the method achieve the depth of understanding required?* Where there was only one meeting giving an opportunity to build a relationship with the co-researcher, superficiality of data might be a problem. Much therefore depended on a few telephone calls arranging the process and my initial analysis of questionnaire, narrative and receipts in familiarising me with the case. There always remain further questions to ask or more areas to explore. However, the cases where I telephoned co-researchers to clarify information following the fieldwork were few. Given the limitations I assessed the system sufficient to argue points and preferable to exploring fewer cases in greater depth.

*Table 4.1 word count of pilot study narratives and interviews*

<i>co-researcher</i>	<i>audio tape transcriptions</i>	<i>interview records</i>
Janice	1,822 words	3,139 words
Louise	295 words	1,287 words
Bob	4,483 words	2,685 words

In general therefore I considered the pilot study to have demonstrated the methodology both to be viable and to render valid data. Some changes to the process of analysis were made and these are discussed next.

#### **4.2.2. questionnaire**

The questionnaire copied in Appendix B is the final version picked up by co-researchers in their habitat; the first point of contact. I made two small alteration to the questionnaire used in the Pilot study. One was to increase the maximum income category in question 23 from '£35,000 or more' to '£50,000 or more' and revise the intermediate categories accordingly. Janice had ticked the highest category and when I carried out the semi-structured interview at her detached house [photograph] and learnt of her domestic help I realised that I might have underestimated the highest level of income I would be considering. The other alteration was less significant. On my supervisor's advice, I removed the abbreviations from one of the occupation categories in question 25.

In anticipation of strong opinions the questionnaires used a five point scale skewed towards positive expressions of concern. All of the replies developed in the study differentiated between replies to individual questions. Only Elaine selected the middle option consistently in questions referring to 'commercial and trade concerns' [Tables 5.2 to 5.4]. Although the questionnaire was not intended to give representative data as in extensive surveys, I felt this indicated that the co-researchers had taken some care with their answers.

### 4.2.3. receipt collection

Instructions for the collection of receipts were mailed to selected respondents to the questionnaire. I had myself collected receipts and found it difficult consistently to remember to ask retailers for them. Janice proved one of the most copious collectors of receipts and encouraged my expectations of a good response. Janice, Louise and Bob all informally reported high consistency rates with their receipt collection. However, because I realised some assessment of collection rates could be useful in assessing confidence, I included with the instructions [Appendix D] a provision for subjective assessment on the guide.

### 4.2.4. narratives

Each co-researcher was sent a blank audio tape and instructions for recording consumer narratives. In the pilot study I used two alternative sets of instructions. The one I adopted for the full study [Appendix C] carries more complete instructions. I transcribed the tapes and ascribed categories to (usually small) segment within the narratives using the format described below in Table 4.2 to Table 4.5. Each category shows a symbol, explanation and an example (mostly taken from the pilot study) of a co-researchers' narrative which I considered to correspond to the insight.

*Table 4.2 bounded rationality: the deliberative process of search and satisficing*

symbol	explanation
	<i>example</i>
<hr/>	
<b>I</b>	Information: evidence of a search for information and/or a decision based partially or solely on information such as a brochure, t.v. advert/documentary, magazine etc. <i>Janice concerned about the low price of the 'New Look' clothes she had been buying: "There is no country of origin. Since enquiring in the shop, and being told that it is not their policy to disclose the source of their products I have become a bit suspicious. They claim that their policy of silence was to protect their source from rival outlets. I intend to write to their head office to see if I can get more information."</i>

On the audio tapes I was looking for *possible and tentative* rather than conclusive evidence of bounded rationality and rationale or philosophy. The narratives are the basis for clarification and further exploration in the semi-structured interview. In cases of considerable doubt I added a question mark and/or note to the categorisation. Sometimes

more than one category was evident in a narrative segment. I noted any further categories which seemed to present themselves: see the inclusion of metaphor in Table 4.3.



**Table 4.3 bounded rationality: systemic decision procedures**

symbol	explanation
example	
<b>H</b>	<p>Heuristic: evidence of a decision based partially or solely on a concept or rule which is specific to the perceived 'ethics' of the situation.</p> <p><i>Bob: "Although some of these things are available from Sainsburys or Tescos ... erm ... we prefer to buy from independent wholefood t...trades traders who aren't owned by multinational or large companies; we feel that this is more ethical and better for the world generally."</i></p>
<b>Im</b>	<p>Imitation: evidence of a decision based partially or solely on the recommendation or action of others.</p> <p><i>Louise: "They [the church] did encourage us, however, ..em.. not t'buy ..em.. their Cafedirect not..not from them but to buy that from Tescos in order to encourage ..erm.. Tesco and other supermarkets an..and ..er.. chain stores to..to stock ..em.. Tradecraft produce."</i></p>
<b>In</b>	<p>Intuition: evidence of a decision based partially or solely on intuition in the (apparent or stated) absence of concrete information.</p> <p><i>Cherry<sup>2</sup> talking about Coca-Cola company and her occasional lapses: "I'm sure that, well I'm not sure at all actually, I don't know enough about Coca-Cola as a company to know who they shit on ..... it's not so much their actual ethics .... they've got lots of dodgy scams going down like trashing peoples fucking rain forests or loads of shares in dodgy companies .... they probably pay all their workers really badly .... the boss is probably on large amounts of cash."</i></p>
<b>C</b>	<p>Context rationality: evidence of rationality in a decision being explained partially or solely on the interplay of people and / or social context.</p> <p><i>Bob talking about the purchase of a Zanussi dishwasher: " I did insist that that's the sort we got or at least one ... erm ... with ... er ... an equivalent low water usage. I suppose time was the most w..was the overriding factor here ... erm ... Mol was aware that we tak... using a lot of time ... erm ... cleaning-up and Hoovering and whatever and she needed for us to have some aspect in the household speeded up so that we've got more time to look after children, and ourselves and do work and whatever ... take the stress out of life."</i></p>
<b>P</b>	<p>Process rationality: where rationality resides in the decision process and so perhaps the enjoyment or ritual of seeking out a suitably ethical product.</p> <p><i>No examples were found in the pilot study.</i></p>
<b>A<sub>d</sub></b>	<p>Adaptive rationality: where the rationality is to be found in long experience and behaviour is based on procedures tried and tested over time.</p> <p><i>Janice has worked out her shopping practices over time: "Janice considered her shopping practices relatively fixed by habit; she was inclined to go to the same places. She said that she became quickly overwhelmed by too much choice and her shopping pattern deliberately restricted it."</i></p>

The second set of categories relate to the boundaries preventing further rational consideration: restrictions on attention time; other egoistic concerns; and the complexity

level of the problem or opportunity consumers face. This is not a distinct set of categories but is likely to overlap with the first set. Context rationality, for instance, may be said to present boundaries in so far as the co-researcher seeks to account for the wishes of others. However a specific set of categorisations, set out in Table 4.4, was thought to be useful in terms of analysis.

**Table 4.4 bounded rationality: the boundaries**

symbol	explanation
example	
	<p>Attention: indications of limitations on attention and time.</p> <p><i>Bob: "Well I settled for the Nestle coffee didn't I ... erm ... but again I suppose I... feeling as though I was under a lot of stress I don't want to have sort of iron out all these things and .. and deal with them so perhaps I sort of felt well what the hell I can't I just can't cope with having to confront this right now so I'll just, I'll just order the coffee and get on with it."</i></p>
	<p>Other concerns: evidence of concerns other than defined 'ethical' ones such as personal health, convenience and pursuing a comfortable life, cost and personal gain, taste and personal appearance etc.</p> <p><i>Janice: "Unfortunately it often isn't possible to take into consideration anything other than whether I can find a pair of shoes to fit in the colour I want and a style that suites me." or Bob: "The fact that there was a bit of unethicalness in it I suppose goes by the by, family life's far too important."</i></p>
	<p>Level of complexity:</p> <p>① Single ethical issue being considered.</p> <p>② More than one ethical issue being considered but no evidence of irresolvability.</p> <p>③ More than one ethical issue being considered with evidence of irresolvability.</p> <p><i>Richard anguishing over fruit: "I am conscious that I like others it'er... many people hav'er had a number of discussions with both friends'er... and ...er... students, as it happens, as regards the...the dilemmas posed by buying fruits from ...er... different countries and ...erm... how difficult it is to work out the pros and cons ...erm... whether by buying fruit is supporting a regime or by buying one is essentially supporting workers who would otherwise be even worse off and there's a whole series of dilemmas like that and ...er... I'm conscious that I ...er... just jump out of these dilemmas."</i></p>

Common ethical rationales drawn from philosophical discourse were used to categorise co-researchers' narratives. Following the pilot study denial categories were added.

During the study a category for metaphors was added. These are shown in Table 4.5. It

should be noted that conventional rule following, presented by March as a rational decision procedure, is included here since it corresponds to a deontological philosophy.

**Table 4.5 ethical consumer rationale / philosophy**

symbol	explanation	example
<b>(V)</b>	Virtue theory: evidence of concern with respondents own actions / life being 'ethical'.	<i>Janice talking about the mahogany kitchen units she had installed: "With hindsight I do feel guilty ..." or Bob: "This meant we could buy ... hm ... organic foods, recycled goods, perhaps even fair trade goods occasionally a...and feel good about it ..."</i>
<b>(C)</b>	Consequentialism: evidence of concern with the consequences of the actions taken.	<i>Janice speaking about the Tradecraft representative: "She also has a supply of many other items which are available through normal retail outlets and in those cases I prefer to buy from them. The aim being to make agencies like Tradecraft and Tearcraft obsolete."</i>
<b>(R)</b>	Rule theory: evidence of general rules being deployed / adhered to such as the 'golden rule': 'do unto others as you would have done by you' or, alternatively, Kant's formulation that any moral should be generalisable.	<i>Cherry "The animal products issue to me is about animal rights predominantly." or Richard talking about financial matters: "Erm... one of them [ethical principles] really is not to be that much bothered by ...er... financial incentives and ...er...erm... playing around with ...er... with money in order to get the best deal. I've got various religious reasons for opposing that particular practice ...."</i>
<b>(R)</b>	Denial of rules; <b>(C)</b> consequences; <b>(V)</b> virtue.	<i>Bob: "I don't believe in being dogmatic about everything."</i>
<b>M</b>	Metaphor:	<i>Richard, speaking of changes he had made to his financial arrangements comments: "Certainly it was ....er... a good decision on both the financial and ethical fronts ..." as if in a battle to gain ground.</i>

### **4.3. researcher triangulation**

Alan Thomas<sup>3</sup> independently, but using the same scheme categorised two of the pilot study audio tape transcriptions (co-researcher narratives). Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 set out the similarities and differences in coding. Alan Thomas' categories are shown by his initials (AT) and mine by (TN). Categories applied are shown in italics and narratives are divided into the co-researchers' themes.



**Table 4.6 researcher triangulation on Janice's audio tape transcription**

<i>narrative</i>	<i>similarities (AT/TN) differences</i>	<i>comment</i>
1.1 Tesco free range	<i>intuition</i> with regard to trusting Tesco's free range products <i>context rationality</i> with daughter being vegetarian (TN)	
1.2 Persian rug	<i>other concerns</i> with colour <i>heuristic</i> linking place of manufacture with fair trading (AT)	<i>heuristic</i> accepted but requires some inference to be made?
1.3 Tradecraft	<i>consequentialist</i> argument about influencing industry; <i>intuition</i> about Tradecraft being OK; <i>heuristic</i> about processing and packaging at source <i>virtue</i> in buying things she can be sure do not violate her principles (TN); <i>heuristic</i> about buying from Tradecraft? (AT)	<i>virtue</i> argument is weak
1.4 pills in bottles	<i>other concerns</i> with care of family	in retrospect, a categorisation of context could have been made
1.5 secateurs	<i>heuristic</i> about low price and possible ethical problem <i>intuition</i> with regard to the travel/cost situation (AT)	
1.6 capsules containing gelatine	<i>other concerns</i> with care of family; <i>information</i> search to trace brand	Alan commented that he didn't know how to categorise this narrative
1.7 free range ham and gammon	no categorisations (AT & TN)	Alan commented that he didn't know how to categorise this narrative
1.8 shoes	<i>heuristic</i> linking place of manufacture with fair trading; <i>other concerns</i> with colour & style <i>other concerns</i> with fit of shoe (AT)	<i>other concerns</i> (TN) were generalised
1.9 oriental rug	<i>other concerns</i> with size, colour & price <i>intuition</i> with regard to potentially accepting information given by vendor? (AT)	
1.10 kitchen in mahogany	<i>attention</i> limitations when making multiple purchases <i>virtue</i> in feeling guilt when violating her principles (TN)	
1.11 clothes at New Look	<i>heuristic</i> linking place of manufacture with fair trading <i>intuition</i> with regard to potentially accepting information given by vendor? (AT)	
1.12 holiday	<i>heuristic</i> about low price and possible ethical problem (TN); <i>intuition</i> in accepting information given by informant? (AT)	

**Table 4.7 researcher triangulation on Bob's audio tape transcription**

<i>narrative</i>	<i>similarities (AT/TN) differences</i>	<i>comment</i>
2.1 Carrot Café	<i>heuristic</i> about patronising cooperatives  <i>heuristic</i> about organic, vegan and vegetarian being better (TN); <i>other concerns</i> (AT) <i>attention</i> limitation (TN) shown by stress; <i>intuition</i> about nice people (TN); <i>other concerns</i> about money (AT); <i>virtue</i> (TN) of feeling good about patronising friends taken as <i>golden rule</i> (AT) and <i>context rationality</i> of negotiation with friends (AT); <i>attention</i> limited by decision on spur of moment (AT)	I (TN) think Alan's golden rule is, on reflection, more appropriate.
2.2 Community Foods	<i>heuristic</i> about preferring independent traders <i>virtue</i> but (TN) on feeling good about it and (AT) being more ethical; <i>other concerns</i> for health <i>consequentialism</i> in being more healthy (AT)?	
2.3 banking	<i>information</i> seeking <i>other concerns</i> for business / finances <i>intuition</i> about efficacy of bank's ethical policy (TN) <i>imitation</i> (potential) of friend (TN) <i>virtue</i> offended by 'non-ethical' decision (TN)	
2.4 dishwasher	<i>context rationality</i> in relation with partner (TN cited more instances); <i>imitation</i> with regard to Zanussi enviro-friendly design (AT) taken as <i>intuition</i> (TN) <i>other concerns</i> for efficiency & time constraints (TN); <i>other concerns</i> apparent cleanliness of wash (AT); <i>other concerns</i> with mess & stress (AT)	
2.5 organic vegetables	<i>consequentialism</i> in environmental effects <i>other concerns</i> for business / finances how to categorise <i>opportunism</i> (AT)??; <i>context rationality</i> in relation with partner (TN); <i>heuristic</i> favouring (TN); <i>other concerns</i> for variety, cost & convenience (TN); <i>virtue</i> offended by inaction (TN)	I'd (TN) taken the <i>opportunism</i> as <i>other concerns</i> for business
2.6 cycles repair	<i>heuristic</i> about supporting cooperatives  <i>context rationality</i> in relation to friends invitation (AT) <i>other concerns</i> lack of time (TN) <i>heuristic</i> about supporting alternative sector (TN) taken by Alan as <i>context rationality</i> in friend's offer <i>virtue</i> offended by 'non-ethical' decision (TN)	I (TN) don't think the friends invitation explains the context. <i>other concerns</i> lack of time (TN), in retrospect, should have been <i>attention</i>

**Table 4.7 researcher triangulation on Bob's audio tape transcription (cont.)**

<i>narrative</i>	<i>similarities (AT/TN)</i> <i>differences</i>	<i>comment</i>
2.7 coffee in cafés	<i>other concerns</i> for health  <i>imitation</i> of Wholesome approach (AT) taken as <i>information</i> seeking within the company (TN); <i>attention</i> limitation (AT) of not being able to confront a problem taken as <i>other concerns</i> (TN); <i>other concerns</i> about allergy (TN); <i>other concerns</i> for 'tasty' coffee (TN)	
2.8 chocolate bar	<i>denial of rules</i> in Bob's rejection of dogmatism  context rationality in relation with partner (AT); <i>rule</i> in complying with promises made (AT); <i>other concerns</i> with importance of family (TN)	I wouldn't disagree with AT
2.9 general	Alan asks how Bob's reflections on general attitude should be categorised; I (TN) categorised what followed: <i>heuristics</i> attitudes he generally follows, <i>information</i> seeking with some items, <i>context rationality &amp; virtue</i> in making a sop to ethicalness	

#### 4.3.1. analysis of triangulation

It is particularly noticeable that *similarities* are sparse in the second case (Table 4.7) and *differences* are legion. However, this is not as indicative of strongly different researcher categorisation as it might at first appear. There is a considerable degree of agreement in the first case [Table 4.5] and overall the two cases in the order of 40% agreement.

Additionally, in both cases categories fundamental to the analysis of how the decision was made, as distinct from the restrictions on decision-making (Table 4.4), exhibit a good degree of agreement.

I suggest I can have sufficient confidence in the categorisation but with the following changes in procedure:

- The narrative often gives insufficient information to be confident of a category. Categorisation is therefore provisional and might attract two or more options. Rather than offering one potential category, at this stage I should be looking to apply as many as might suit and clarifying positions in the semi-structured interview.

- There was some confusion between categories: e.g. *other concerns* and restrictions on *attention*. The guide to categorisation was amended. In the example *other concerns* related to narrative where a specific other concern is mentioned whereas restrictions on *attention* to statements of situation such as stress or lack of time.
- Some categorisations were made by one but not the other researcher. I was *a little* more inclined to categorise than Alan. Additionally under-categorising may have occurred where a categorisation was previously made and not repeated but could have been; simply missing an opportunity. In retrospect most of Alan's 'extras' looked good to me and some like the 'golden rule' offered challenging insights. Since categories were often very tentative it was better to over, rather than under categorise at the early stage to facilitate question formation. Such a practice is often recommended<sup>4</sup>.
- I was more inclined to find virtue theory where the co-researcher referred to themselves and their morality. By contrast Alan offered consequentialism, say, in improved health of self. In the case of consequentialism, I think, the ethical context requires the consequence considered to be general rather than personal (the greatest happiness for the greatest number) but in the strictest sense Alan could, of course, be right. Again these needed clarification.

The researcher triangulation process in qualitative research is exploratory as opposed to definitive. Rather than *testing* the robustness of categories it is *exploring* applicability.

Indeed there is only a necessary requirement to define the categories because I begin with a theory<sup>5</sup>. With the above alterations in process my theory categorisation seems to offer a workable approach.

#### **4.4. generation of questions for semi-structured interviews**

In the structure and justification set out below there are both preliminary and supplementary questions. The latter may bear some similarity between cases, but not

necessarily so. Thomas<sup>6</sup> endorses this approach: "Following up reasons behind reasons given is much more important in this type of interviewing than covering the same topics in each interview."

Although I predominately used non-directive questions because they "are less likely to result in the omission of factors of which the researcher has not thought", as Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson point out, directive questions have value but at different points in the study ".... depending on the function of the questioning ....". The same authors include examples of non-directive questions which quote back to the respondent things they have said and ask for clarification or expansion. As the following will show, I used this process extensively.

Questions were written as prompts on index cards which were also used for notes (the small size of cards aimed to concentrate and restrict my possible note taking to prompts). The order of questions was not fixed. However, I considered that some, relating to the subjective scope of ethical consumption, would be useful in contextualising the discussion. Likewise clarification would usefully be an early topic whereas discussion of decision making should constitute the main middle section of the semi-structured interview. I felt more probing philosophical questions would benefit from being close to the end when as much mutual confidence as possible had been established.

"Now it is certainly true that the influence of the researcher on the production of data is an important issue, but it is misleading to regard it simply as a source of bias that must be, or can be entirely, removed."<sup>8</sup> Researchers need to be aware of the context of questioning. It is for this reason that I made an assessment of the conviviality of the situation and noted, for example, the initial difficulties I sensed with Belinda. As the interview proceeded she confided that she had been suspicious that I might be an animal rights activist and therefore opposed to her animal experiment connections.

In the main fieldwork, I made some small amendments from the structure of the original questions I asked of Janice, Louise and Bob. The main revision was to the question aimed at eliciting an outline of the co-researcher's philosophical approach. In place of a leading question intended to encourage a consequentialist reply I felt happier with one intended to be neutral [4.4.9] as discussed below. The next section (4.4.1 to 4.4.10) explains the types of questions included in the semi-structured interviews, the sources of information used to formulate them precisely, examples of the form of the question and supplementaries.

#### **4.4.1. question about *scope* of 'ethical' purchasing / concept of 'ethical' (first question).**

Co-researchers may underestimate their 'ethical' purchasing by forgetting what they do or simply being so familiar with it that they don't think to say. The purpose of my questioning was first therefore to invite co-researchers to reflect on their ethical consumption. Conversely if the co-researcher were to deny purchase behaviour suggested by me as 'ethically' motivated then it followed that exaggeration was unlikely. The second purpose was to increase understanding of how 'ethical' was being constructed.

**sources of information:** Receipts may indicate other possible 'ethical' consumer behaviours which form part of the secondary directive questioning.

**form:** Non-directive questions with directive secondary questions.

**formulation:** *You have told me about [narratives from the audio-tape]. Are there other ethical purchases you make that are not included on the audio tape or receipts?*

**supplementary:** *Some people I've spoken to, for instance, have forgotten to say they are vegetarian by conviction, deliberately make trips on public transport, buy bulk items to save packaging etc.*

**variety of forms:** Supplementary questions to refer to any findings or notable purchases in the receipts that I believed might indicate ethical purchases but not to mention things that have already been cited by co-researcher.

**academic justification:** The “dangers [to] be borne in mind” with supplementary leading questions were that the co-researcher might accept suggested socially desirable practices as part of their ‘ethical consumption’ rendering the concept ridiculous. I had evidence from the pilot study that this would probably not be the case [see for instance: bob-ssi: 139-142].

#### **4.4.2. clarification questions (early question).**

Considerable clarification was required in some cases especially with regard to manner in which receipts had been marked. Also any apparent inconsistencies within and between forms of data required explanation. I limited myself to seven clarification questions.

**sources of information:** Questionnaire, receipts and audio-tape transcription.

**form:** Co-researchers were directed to the matter requiring clarification mostly by quoting from the data but questions were non-directive.

**formulation:** *You say [co-researcher referred to the issue]. How should I understand this?*

**supplementary:** As required to promote understanding.

**variety of forms:** Questions specific to case study.

**academic justification:** Where “... clarification may be necessary if ambiguity is to be resolved”, Hammersley & Atkinson<sup>10</sup> approve an example of questioning based on the quoting of answers back to respondents to confirm, clarify and develop points.

#### **4.4.3. questions about decisions (middle of interview).**

Questioning aims to press co-researchers to explore the decisions they have reported. A deeper understanding is aimed at.

**sources of information:** Receipts and audio-tape transcription.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *You say [co-researcher referred to a decision explanation] How do you know? / Where did you find this out? / Would you explain?*

**supplementary:** As necessary to clarify sources or lack of sources.

**variety of forms:** Case specific questioning taking a variety of appropriate forms.

Examples of some of these are given above.

**academic justification:** I am particularly interested here, as Thomas<sup>11</sup> says, "to 'probe', ask difficult questions, and try to find satisfactory explanations."

#### **4.4.4. questions about *origins* of ethical consumption (middle of interview).**

Whilst I have no specific commitment to looking at change over time, this questioning encourages co-researchers to consider the origins and development of their ethical consumption. I am concerned in very broad terms with changes in emphasis and to be able to say whether the co-researcher is better seen as a new or accomplished ethical consumer.

**sources of information:** Narratives.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *You have said that you buy [ethical products or services]. How long have you been [doing this practice]?*

**supplementary:** *Are there other ethical purchases which predate these or would help me to date the beginnings of your ethical purchasing?*

**variety of forms:** Appropriate to each case.

#### **4.4.5. question about perceived *complexity* (middle of interview).**

The theory of bounded rationality suggests that increasing complexity will not necessarily demand longer deliberation. However, it may be important to understand the



degree of complexity co-researchers associate with the purchases they undertake. The question seeks to illustrate each co-researcher's reasoning and invite further consideration.

**sources of information:** Narratives.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *With some of the purchases you make there seems to be a single ethical issue. So with [example data]. With others there are two or more issues such as with [example data]. How should I understand this?*

**supplementary:** Clarification as required.

**variety of forms:** As suits each case.

#### **4.4.6. questions about *communications* (middle of interview).**

In bounded rationality decision makers are not *supposed* to be perfectly informed nor to decide in isolation. This question, therefore, has two purposes: for the co-researcher to muse on both the nature and the extent of their communications.

**sources of information:** Narrative.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *You say [some form of communication from the narrative]. Could you tell me more about this?*

**supplementary:** *Are there ways that you communicate about, or find out about, information on relevant ethical issues?*

**variety of forms:** Case specific narratives.

#### **4.4.7. questions about *other activities* (middle of interview).**

Bounded rationality postulates an attention limited individual decision maker. It is important therefore to be able to say something of the activities competing for attention especially where they also are seen as moral pursuits.

**sources of information:** Narratives.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *We've talked about your ethical purchasing [and any other attention consuming activities that have arisen in the interview]. Are there other things you do, charitable, voluntary, pressure groups, whatever, that show your ethical concerns? If so how long have you been involved in these things?*

**supplementary:** [If their occupation is not mentioned and they are employed] *You work in [occupation if known], please tell me about this.*

**variety of forms:** Case specific.

#### **4.4.8. *hypothetical question* (near end of interview).**

The hypothetical question is intended to encourage the co-researcher to go through the thought process of a possible purchase in the present where memory is not an issue. The answer is not to be taken as an actual decision process as in verbal protocols but as an indication of the resources available to the co-researcher, the scope of their knowledge and their deliberative process or procedures.

**sources of information:** Narratives of 'failures', informal conversations and questionnaire for attitudes provide material for suggesting where a co-researcher has strong attitudes that are not realised in purchasing practice.

**form:** Directive where the researcher uses judgement to find some credible purchase the co-researcher might wish to make but has not so far made.

**formulation:** *Hypothetically, if you had decided to buy [some 'ethical' purchase the co-researcher had reported wanting, but failing, preferably because of time restraints, to make] how would you go about it?*

**supplementary:** Clarification of process or procedure and document search as necessary.

**variety of forms:** Specific purchase tailored to particular co-researcher.

**academic justification:** To simulate a verbal protocol as recommended by Carroll & Johnson [see discussion in section 3.5.5].

#### **4.4.9. question about *philosophy* (close to end).**

In these questions I am concerned to understand co-researchers' rationale for consuming ethically. At the time of the pilot study I thought I should use questioning directed towards a consequentialist answer. Neo-classical rationalism assumes a form of consequentialism and I do not expect this approach. If as I have theorised people (especially those with religious affiliations) will use deontological reasoning then, as a test, I can prompt them with a question inviting a consequentialist answer. If they still insist on answering with a deontological philosophy I can be reasonably sure that that is what they do. Note also that it is easier to apply a rule than to calculate or assess utility. However, it became clear from the pilot study that a distinction between the three philosophical justifications would not be made by all co-researchers. I decided therefore to use a non-directive question.

**form:** Non-directive.

**formulation:** *What is the importance of the ethical purchases you make?*

**supplementary:** I repeated the co-researcher's answer paraphrased as far as possible in clear consequential, virtue and/or deontological terms.

**variety of forms:** After the pilot study all co-researchers were asked the same question.

**academic justification:** Directive questions can be “extremely useful in testing hypotheses and trying to penetrate fronts.” And a “useful tactic is to make the question ‘lead’ in a direction opposite to that in which one expects the answer to lie, and thus avoid the danger of misleadingly confirming ones expectations ....”<sup>12</sup> However useful such an approach might have been, in the light of initial findings a non-directive approach was thought preferable. Additionally because of the importance of this question I consistently asked for confirmation of the initial reply<sup>13</sup>.

#### **4.4.10. question about changes in *lifestyle* (concluding question).**

To encourage co-researchers to talk about their attitudes towards sustainable, ‘ethical’ consumerism and what competing or conflicting attitudes or desires, if any, they think they have. This was used in conjunction with photographs, and to a lesser extent receipts and consumer durable reports, to *assess* consumer commitments and conflicts. It is therefore intended as a guide to a more rounded or comprehensive understanding of the co-researcher’s (perhaps contradictory) position.

**sources of information:** Level of income as reported in the questionnaire.

**form:** Directive - this hypothetical question is intended to carry an implied critique of consumption.

**formulation:** *If it were necessary to reduce your lifestyle to achieve your ‘ethical’ beliefs, how would you feel about this?* (average and above income)

**supplementary:** Reiterate co-researcher’s answer for confirmation.

**variety of forms:** In the questionnaire I ask for household income and the number of people provided for by that income. Table 4.8 allows in broad terms for me to describe these incomes alternatively as *average*, *below average* or *above average*. Although the figures are for 1994/5 they are unlikely to have changed very significantly and are taken only to give a broad guide.

**Table 4.8 gross household income 1994/5: by household type**

<i>Retired household</i>	<i>av. annual income</i>	<i>Non-retired household</i>	<i>av. annual income</i>	<i>Non-retired household</i>	<i>av. annual income</i>
single person	£7124	single person	£13,832	couple with:	
couple	£12,792	lone parent with:		no children	£25,896
other	£15,652	dependent children	£10,556	dependent children	£27,924
		non-dependent children only	£17,680	non-dependent children only	£34,320

(Social Trends 27, 1997 p91)

It would seem inappropriate to ask people with a below average income about changes in lifestyle to achieve sustainability. Therefore this last question were phrased differently for those below average income:

*Are there any hopes of an improved lifestyle that you have that you think might conflict with your 'ethical' views?*

#### **4.5. how the field work was carried out**

My strong inclination was not to study ethical consumers in my home town. During the early part of my literature review I had read reports of too many consumer surveys, particularly from American business schools, employing captive university students as subjects. I determined to avoid such a parochial approach. I intended to locate consumers in the habitats defined in the last chapter, along a railway line north and south from where I live.

**Table 4.9 making contact with co-researchers**

<i>location</i>	<i>establishments approached</i>	<i>number participating</i>	<i>means of contact</i>
wholefood shops	three	three	A staff member was asked to give out envelopes to customers s/he thought might be interested.
shops (fair trade and alternative)	two	two	The manager of the shop was asked to give out envelopes to customers s/he thought might be interested.
university	two	two	A contact academic promised to bring the study to the attention of colleagues and give out envelopes as necessary.
vegetarian café	one	one	Brief introductory notes on yellow card were left on each table asking interested parties to speak to the manager and pick up an envelope.
church	two	one	A secretary was asked to give out envelopes to churchgoers she thought might be interested.

I began in a city at the furthest convenient point, some fifty miles away. In each of the places where I hoped to contact ethical consumers, I left envelopes containing the introductory letter (Appendix A), the questionnaire and a return prepaid envelope. These were given out in various ways appropriate to the habitat as set out in Table 4.9.

Considering the usual low reply rate to questionnaires, being more pessimistic than I had suggested in the last chapter [3.9] and bearing in mind the multiple extra tasks I wanted my co-researchers to perform, I expected to attract and retain only a few co-researchers in each town / city. In the first city, to my surprise, I attracted more than sufficient willing examples of ethical consumers. As Table 4.10 indicates, twenty-two questionnaires were returned.

*Table 4.10 completed and uncompleted case studies*

<i>stage / location</i>	<i>questionnaires returned</i>	<i>research cases uncompleted</i>	<i>research cases completed</i>
pilot study	4*		3
city habitats	22	1	11
		6	
protests	4*	5 not pursued	2
		2 lost contact	
total	30	14	16

\* one questionnaire was substituted by an interview

Ethical consumers are it seems passionate about their ethics and more than willing to take part in what I had presented as quite a demanding task. I think, for example, Felicity and her partner had great fun taking part in the study. Of course this would be so, I retrospectively thought.

#### **4.5.1. the first city and elsewhere: habitats**

As I began to scrutinise the returns I became concerned that the lifestyle of those responding seemed to be fairly conventional and somewhat different from those described to me by Tracey Bedford in her concurrent research. It seemed that I might not have paid sufficient attention to the literature that had segmented consumers in terms of strength of concern. Peattie<sup>14</sup> for instance, discussing the green consumer, speaks of

'shades of green', and as set out in chapter two market researchers differentiate between strong ethicals or activists and armchair ethicals.

If my exploratory work was to be about "... choosing those whose testimony seems most likely to develop and test emerging analytic ideas"<sup>15</sup> I was not, I thought, locating some very important examples of ethical consumers. For this reason I decided to add a further habitat, 'protest', to locate those activists with a more radical approach. These contacts are indicated in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.11 co-researchers' contact habitats**

CS	pseudonym	alternative venue	religious group	information rich	protests
03	Bob	Food coop			
10	Lucy	Ecology Co. shop			
11	Elaine	Vegie café			
17	Felicity	Vegie café			
13	Natasha	Food coop			
09	Misha	Food coop			
08	Anthony	Vegie café			
06	Peter	Vegie café			
02	Janice		Church group		
04	Louise		Church group		
12	Jewel		Traidcraft shop		
14	Robert		Traidcraft shop		
05	Alan			University	
07	Belinda			University	
15	James				Critical mass
16	Patrick				Critical mass

The final case studies all pursued to conclusion are shown in Table 4.11. Apart from the pilot cases, and the two I approached in a Critical Mass bicycle protest, all were located in the first city of study.

#### **4.5.2. an excursion into the pleasures and frustrations of field work: in search of Olivia Kate and G. F. Tamberoni**

Locating people in protests was a task for which I was not fully prepared. Not only was there greater initial suspicion of what I was doing than with most of those contacted elsewhere but also I lost contact with some respondents. When I received a completed questionnaire, as was my practice, I sent an audio tape and instructions to Olivia Kate. A neat pack of receipts and the tape were returned but the forwarding address for Olivia failed to elicit further replies. I had a comprehensive set of receipts and a potential co-

researcher who said she thought all her purchases were ethical [Appendix H]. I visited the address but could not raise anyone from behind the barred facade of what I took to be an hostel. I thought I might find her on the monthly demonstration where I made initial contact. In vain, and to the amused comments of the demonstrators on critical mass cycle demonstration, I held up a placard proclaiming 'I'm looking for Olivia Kite'.

Another interesting but fruitless day was spent enquiring around the recent residence of a respondent signing himself G. F. Tamberoni. He had lived in the city's market area that was, when I arrived, a buzz of activity. I knocked on the red door squeezed between two shops but there was no reply. The proprietor of the wholefood shop next door, a likely haunt I thought, said the owner of the flats behind the red door is Italian and we mused over the probability of a connection. It seemed likely I was in the right location and I remembered a photocopy I had been given to read that suggested qualitative research was rather like being a detective. The proprietor would, he said, contact me when he next saw the owner; another business card.

I achieved no further contact with either. Some people who frequent demonstrations, report very low incomes and strong ethical attitudes, it seems frequently change address. Although I located and worked with two ethical consumers from the critical mass demonstration, sufficient to show just how different from each other radical projects can be, I can't help speculating that Olivia and G. F., would have made excellent case studies.

The fact that more radical contributors seemed more difficult to retain meant that in order to ensure a successful completion I was willing to treat them differently. Unlike survey techniques, not all interviewees need be asked the same questions<sup>16</sup> nor necessarily approached similarly. I had already accepted that rather than recording narratives Alan could email and Lucy send a letter. I now accepted that James, having written down his month's purchases and thrown away his receipts, could simply report



his purchases and that I would have two interviews with Patrick, because he had (wisely) refused to fill in a questionnaire as it would misrepresent his views.

Conversely, I thought most of the case studies were procedurally successful. Field trips were arranged to interview at most four cases over two or three days. Time was allowed, very deliberately<sup>17</sup>, to word process notes between interviews. I returned from forays by train bubbling with ideas about the co-researchers. Unfailingly such enthusiasm was tempered as the batteries in the 'old' laptop computer I had taken failed half way through the final interview record. Handwriting the rest and knowing it had to be word processed later was a laborious task.

#### **4.6. data analysis**

I carried out my data analysis in three broad sweeps. The preliminary stage, set out in chapter five, was relatively unreflective. It took, for example, factual information, reported attitudes and ethical consumption, and photographs to offer an initial picture of each co-researcher. These synopses were checked by my co-researchers. I will argue in chapter seven that such an anchor is important in multiple case study research. In the subsequent case study stages I utilised dedicated software and gave a clear trail of evidence.

##### **4.6.1. informants review / 'member checking'**

Validating iterations were successfully accomplished (all cases returned annotated documents) at two points: semi-structured interview report and synopsis.

My transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were agreed and commented upon by each co-researcher. In all cases some changes were suggested and substantially incorporated these. No significant or major changes were proposed by the co-researchers. Thus even though the texts were written from my viewpoint, I take them to represent our negotiated narrative. Extracts from these narratives are therefore treated as quotes (*in the third person*) to differentiate them from the general text.

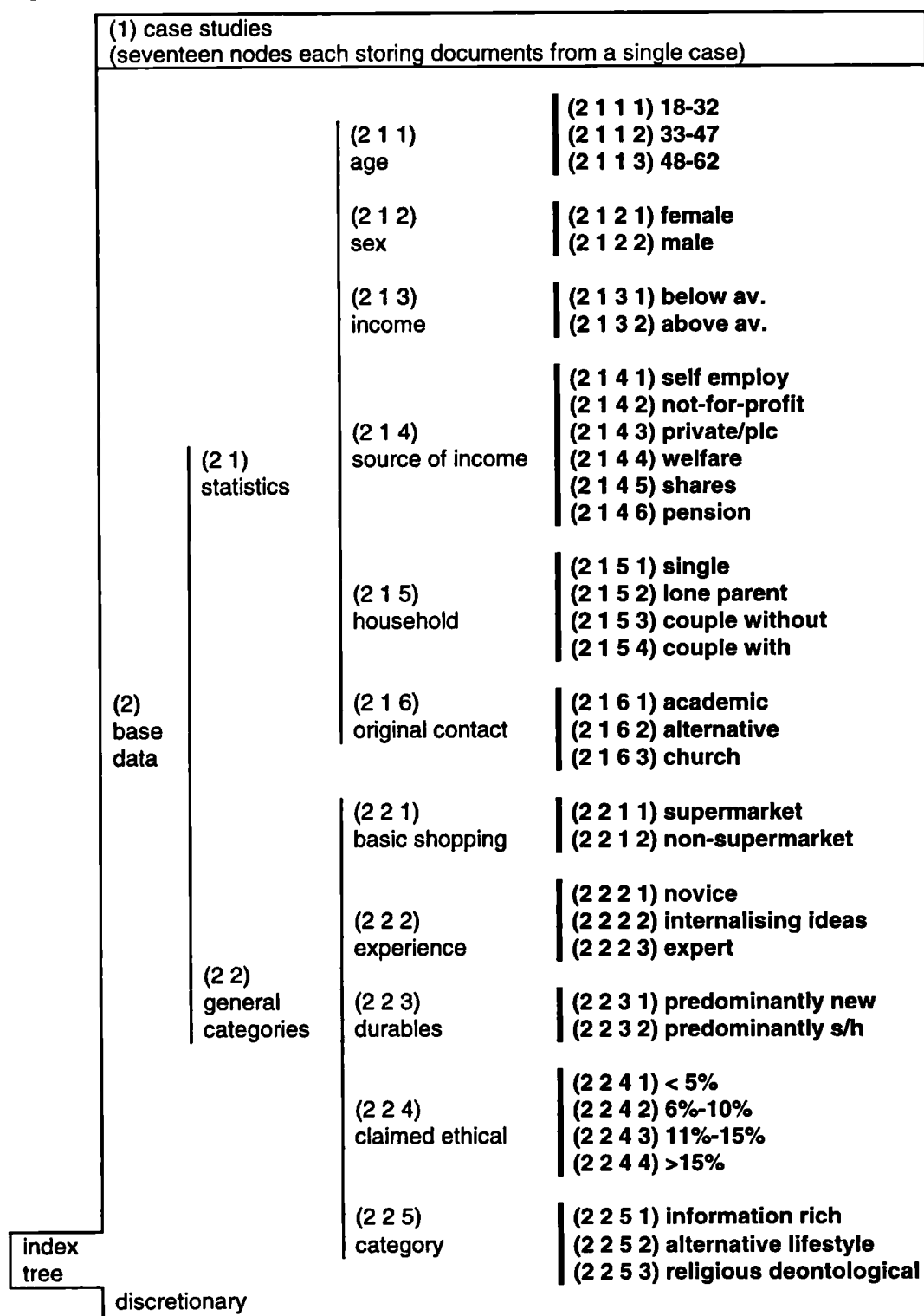
My synopses were confirmed by co-researchers usually with some proposed alterations. Whilst none of these were fundamental some were certainly significant. Jewel informed me, for instance, that she and her husband were long term vegetarians [Appendix I] (whereas I had thought them omnivores) and Robert considered I had rather overstated his move towards local shopping [Appendix J]. Such changes confirmed the value of the checking process.

#### **4.6.2. QSR Nud•ist**

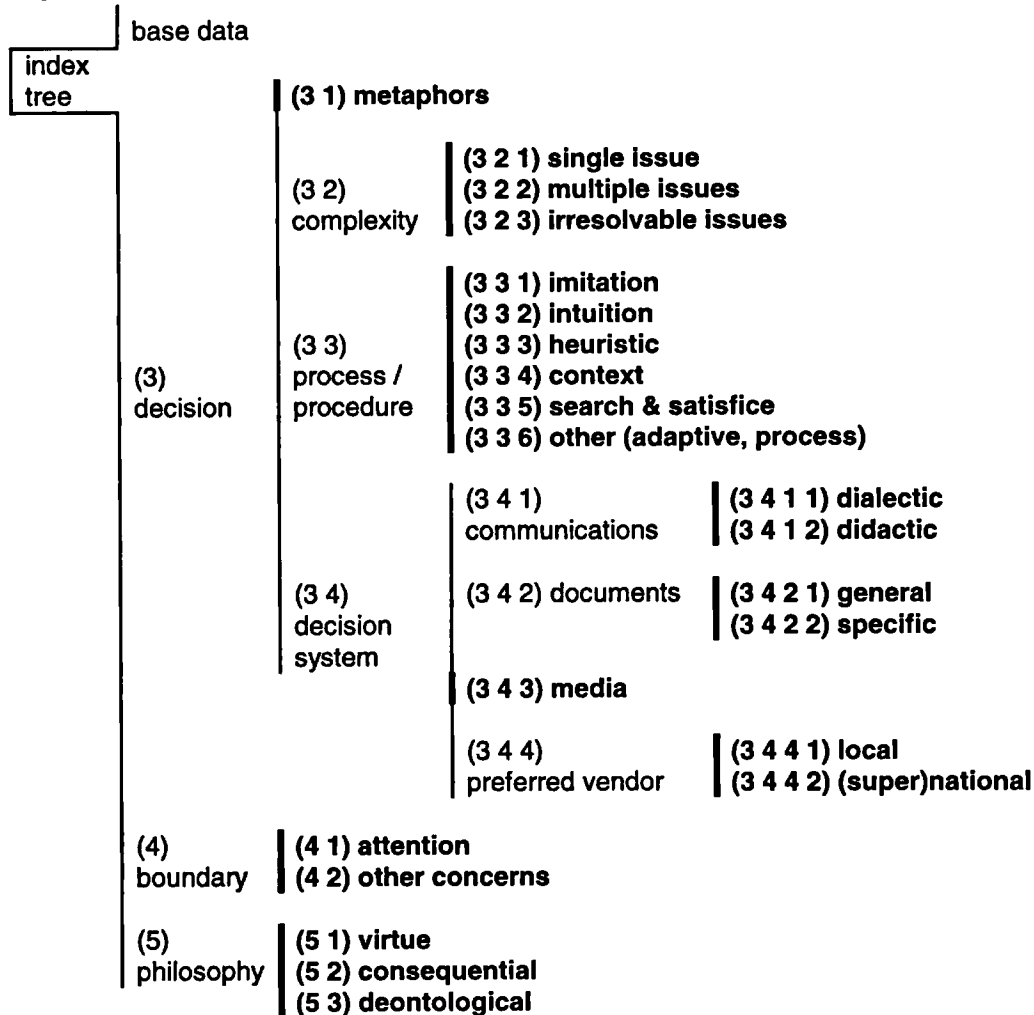
Co-researcher's transcribed narratives and my (approved and corrected) notes of semi-structured interviews were 'introduced' to the qualitative database: QSR Nud•ist. In introducing textual data to the software, *text units* of, in this case a single line were created each with its own unique reference. It is to these text units that the trail of evidence refers.

QSR Nud•ist allows the creation an 'index trees' of categories with which to order the data. This is detailed in two sections: Figure 4.1, the case study material (1) base data tree (2) (mostly storing factual data) and Figure 4.2, discretionary tree (3, 4 & 5) (storing data in accordance with my analysis of, for example, decision making). The software then enabled the selection, subdivision, ordering reorganisation and search facilities necessary to qualitative analysis.

Figure 4.1 base data tree



**Figure 4.2 discretionary tree**



Each of the categories shown is referred to as a node and it will be seen that these closely follow the theoretical structure of the study. Although base data was categorised as shown [Figure 4.1], many nodes were not in practice used. For instance there were insufficient examples of ethical consumers to render 'sources of income' meaningful. By contrast I utilised the nodes in the discretionary tree [Figure 4.2] fully as the following chapters will illustrate. These nodes were often sub-divided. Imitation was, for instance, divided into: 'boycott', 'buycott', 'personal', 'pre-selection' and 'approved'. A full tree can be viewed in QSR Nud•ist.

#### **4.6.3. trails of evidence**

The trail of evidence [shown in straight brackets] is mostly but not wholly achieved by reference to documents and nodes in Nud•ist. Other references are to documents or chapter sections within the thesis. References are made in the text in the following way:

- to Nud•ist *text unit(s)*:

[pseudonym-document type, text unit number(s)] e.g. [fel-ssi: 122] refers to text unit 122 of the semi-structured interview with Felicity.

- to Nud•ist *discussion node(s)*:

[node number(s)] e.g. [3 3 1] refers to *imitation* under *procedures* (3.3) of the *decision* node (3) of the discretionary tree [Figure 4.2]; note that I follow the Nud•ist pattern with spaces between digits.

- to document(s) not introduced to Nud•ist:

[document category] e.g. [questionnaire] directs the reader to completed questionnaires.

- to a chapter or chapter section:

[chapter (section) number] e.g. [7.2.1] refers to chapter 7, section 2, point 1; note that I follow the MSWord pattern with a point between digits.

The trail of evidence acts as reference but also functioned as a discipline during my analysis.

#### **4.6.4. analysing co-researchers' decisions and philosophy**

In the second stage, reported in chapter six, I analysed particular decision processes and procedures. In most cases I further categorised decisions in relation to my assessment of the data (as distinct from any relation to the theory of bounded rationality). Similarly the chapter sections correspond to the theory whereas in the content I have developed themes arising from the data. In the first instance, which themes I developed depended on my assessment of their importance, resting in turn on the number of relevant entries

and the diversity of co-researcher contributions. Conversely, however, even a single segment would be referred to where, say, a developing theme was contradicted. Considerable judgement was therefore used in relating these developing themes to the broadening analysis of individual decision making.

Chapter seven reports my analysis of the rationales employed by my co-researchers. As with the decision analysis described above, further categorisation was developed and a similar selection process was used to formulate and challenge key themes. In both chapters six and seven my construction of analysis was effectively constrained and mediated by the demands of my trail of evidence.

notes and references:

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<sup>1</sup> Griffiths (1995), p291.

<sup>2</sup> Cherry's words are taken from Tracey Bedford's (1996) unpublished research data on ethical consumers at *University College London*.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Thomas is my supervisor on the study at the Open University.

<sup>4</sup> Lofland, cited in Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p195, recommends playing 'wild'.

<sup>5</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p195 say, for instance, that in ethnographic research 'there is no requirement that ... there be explicit rules for assigning [categories].'

<sup>6</sup> Thomas (1998), p326.

<sup>7</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p152.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p129.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p155.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p153.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas (1998), p307.

<sup>12</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p153.

<sup>14</sup> Peattie (1992).

<sup>15</sup> Glaser & Strauss (1967) cited in Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p138.

<sup>16</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p152.

<sup>17</sup> This practice is highly recommended by Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), p178.

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## **5. co-researchers: sixteen ethical consumers**

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This chapter introduces the co-researchers; the case studies on which the thesis is based. I offer a synopsis of each co-researcher accompanied by photographs to *set the scene*. Although each of these synopses is approved by the subject as a fair representation, my concern here is less with rigour and more with establishing character. Thus I have not offered a trail of evidence. I have been concerned to *represent* the co-researcher. As accepted in my methodology, it is important to be able to relate attitudes, intentions and behaviour to specific cases and the synopses are the main quick reference points to achieve this. The reader may also find the tables in chapter seven to be useful in this respect. Prior to introducing the co-researchers, there is a brief diversion to meet those who did not fully contribute to the study. They are significant, not least, in illustrating the importance of the frame of bounded rationality; for various reasons they were too busy to continue with the process.

The secondary purpose of the chapter is to establish that the examples comply with the theoretical requirements proposed in chapters two and three. Further to this, some broad comments are made concerning the examples in general. This is particularly in respect to their attitudes and behaviour relative to the previous extensive studies by others that underpin the notion of 'ethical consumer' developed in the introduction.

### ***5.1. case study non-responses***

There were five replies, from females, to my questionnaire that I did not pursue because I had attained the required even balance between the sexes. Of the cases I progressed past the initial questionnaire, six, for various reasons, did not complete. There are however some conclusions to be drawn from the data I received.

Two respondents, unusually, reported extremely strong concerns about all the issues presented in the questionnaire. They, one female and one male, were of 'no fixed abode' [questionnaires] and in spite of considerable efforts, referred to in the previous chapter, I

lost contact with them. One returned a comprehensive collection of receipts (more than 90%) but declined to record the audio-tape because she said 'I recorded on the tape and rubbed it off again. I don't actually buy things I consider are unethical.' [Appendix H].

Three respondents were simply too busy. One, an academic who during a number of telephone conversations reported having collected receipts but also being immersed in an evaluation process at his university did not send data. I visited a second, who I had heard from a third party is an architect practising environmentally sound design and reputedly had cycled extensively to circulate her advertising literature. She was a well known customer at the wholefood cooperative where Natasha worked. Our conversation seemed to confirm her credentials, the extent to which she tried professionally to practice her belief and the difficulties this brought, not least of low income [questionnaire]. Again she said she had collected receipts but did not submit data. The final respondent here simply wrote that she could 'not put the time in at the moment' because she was off on holiday and moving house on return.

I spent some time talking with the final respondent I want to introduce here. She had reported particularly strong views in her questionnaire and seemed to have a high commitment to taking part in the study. During the conversation I learnt that she thought of herself as a Pagan and spent much of the summer living at gatherings in temporary dwellings made from bent tree branches covered with tarpaulin sheets and called 'benders'. I felt she was an extremely agreeable, disorganised person who spoke about the benefits she would derive from collecting receipts as helping her get a grip on her finances. In her concluding letter [Appendix K] she referred to herself as 'another unreliable hippy'. She said she was struggling with her life and had been 'overwhelmed' with problems since her relationship broke up. I am presenting this as data but at the same time I need to record my sympathy.

I want to draw three points from these uncompleted cases. Firstly, consistent with the findings of the extensive research, more women than men presented themselves for



study. Secondly, each of those who did not complete have demonstrable other concerns in their lives. These may relate to their work, accommodation or to other events or periods in their lives that override their concerns about ethical consumerism that are otherwise sufficiently important for them to volunteer themselves for study<sup>1</sup>. We may reasonably presume that not all such 'other concerns' would have been uncovered either in the case of those who did not complete or among the co-researchers. Concerns with human relationships and sexuality for instance that often may demand considerable attention are rarely discussed in general research situations. Finally, as my 'unreliable hippy' shows, not everyone's life is sufficiently organised, or organised in such a way as to be amenable to a formalised study procedure. Whilst my study did not aim at representation of ethical consumers in general, whether or not that were to prove a reasonable concept, this finding suggests a cautionary note for those who do. I would say that the more formally structured a survey was the more difficulty there would be in obtaining a representative sample of ethical consumers. Spontaneous and sometimes chaotic lives require different methods to record them.

## ***5.2. taxonometric examples: theoretical categories***

Examples of ethical consumers were initially sought in three habitats: 'alternative' venues, religious fair-trade groups and information rich organisations. In practice the alternative venues were three wholefood cooperatives, a vegetarian café, and an ecology retailer selling an eclectic range of magazines, recycled paper products, sustainable power gizmos etc. The religious groups included Protestant and Catholic churches and a Traidcraft (Christian) shop. The information rich habitats were two universities not connected to the Open University. As it seemed during the fieldwork stage that those responding from these habitats did not include people pursuing very radical lifestyles, a further habitat was added: 'protest'. In practice I contacted people through a critical mass cycle demonstration<sup>2</sup>. The places of contact are shown for each co-researcher in Table 5.1.

As I became more familiar with each co-researcher it became possible to locate them additionally in other habitats. So, for instance, it can be seen from Patrick's receipts that some of his shopping had been at wholefood cooperatives and Peter replied in interview that he protested against the occupation of Tibet by the 'oppressive regime' in China. Since my aim was to have recourse to at least three co-researchers from each habitat, I had ample data from those frequenting alternative venues and sufficient associated with religious fair trade initiatives. Since Misha and Natasha are post-graduate students, and Robert is an academic, I can consider five to be clearly information rich within the terms set out in chapter three.

*Table 5.1 co-researcher's habitats*

CS	pseudonym	alternative	religious group	information rich	protest
03	Bob	wholefood coop			
10	Lucy	Ecology Co.			
11	Elaine	vegie café			
17	Felicity	vegie café			
13	Natasha	wholefood coop		university	
09	Misha	wholefood coop		university	
08	Anthony	Vegie café			radical theatre
06	Peter	Vegie café			Tibet protest
02	Janice		church		
04	Louise		church		
12	Jewel		Traidcraft shop		'old' Labour
14	Robert	wholefood coop	Traidcraft shop	university	
05	Alan	wholefood coop		university	
07	Belinda			university	
15	James	wholefood coop			Critical mass
16	Patrick	wholefood coop			Critical mass
contact habitat:					
additional habitat:					

Although I lost contact with some ethical consumers I met at protests<sup>3</sup>, Anthony's comparably low income [questionnaire] and very considerable involvement in radical theatre [ant-ssi: 195/201] places him in a similar habitat. Although I might easily have met Peter or Jewel had I chosen a different manifestation of the activist habitat they are both considerably more conventional than James, Patrick and Anthony. It is not ideal that all with the most radical lifestyle, James, Patrick and Anthony, are male. I would have preferred to have at least one from each habitat of each sex but I have argued in

chapter three that this aspect is not critical to the study. For these reasons I consider my theoretical examples sufficient. In Table 5.2 I have placed co-researchers in the taxonomy categories I believe most appropriate for my further analysis.

It has not been claimed, nor is it necessary or possible, that I should have covered all conceivable habitats. A further habitat discussed early in the project was that of the 'successful' who have espoused ethical consumerism<sup>4</sup>. Here I might have included celebrities, for instance, Angus Deayton and Joanna Lumley who have conspicuously associated themselves with the Fair Trade Foundation and of course successful social entrepreneurs like Anita Roddick. Again the question of how they construct themselves as ethical consumers might have offered interesting insights. Celebrity remains an interesting habitat but here limitation of capacity prevailed.

*Table 5.2 a taxonomy of co-researchers: theoretical categories*

<i>group</i>	<i>pseudonym</i>
religious group	Janice, Jewel, Louise and Robert.
radicals	Anthony, James and Patrick.
information rich	Alan, Belinda, Misha, Robert, and (Natasha).
'alternatives' (general ethical consumers)	Bob, Elaine, Felicity, Lucy, Natasha and Peter.

Note: (names) in brackets are those I consider to be marginal to the category.

### **5.3. surveying my theoretical examples**

What is the nature of my examples? Are they ethical consumers within the definition I have adopted? If they were surveyed by market researchers how would I expect them to respond?

In terms similar to those used in the Mintel study<sup>5</sup>, the attitudes expressed in the questionnaire are shown in Table 5.3, Table 5.4 and Table 5.5. The data in these tables are arranged with co-researcher's responses in ascending order of general concern from left to right for each of the categories set out in the questionnaire. Issues are arranged within categories in descending order of *group* concern from top to bottom. It should not, of course, be supposed that this arrangement represents a 'true' grading of attitudes since responses to questionnaires are idiosyncratic. However, it seems logical to order the data for presentation and some general sense of difference may be inferred.

Table 5.3 co-researchers' environmental attitudes

	case study	16	02	04	05	07	09	10	06	03	15	08	14	13	11	12	17
environmental concern	Patrick	Janice	Louise	Alan	Belinda	Misha	Lucy	Peter	Bob	James	Anthony	Robert	Natasha	Elaine	Jewel	Fellicity	
forest destruction	n/a	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	
acid rain	n/a	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	
water pollution	n/a	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	
maximising recycling of materials	n/a	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	
dangers arising from nuclear power	n/a	2	3	3	4	2	4	3	3	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	
the Ozone layer depletion	n/a	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	5	4	
global warming (greenhouse effect)	n/a	2	2	4	3	3	3	4	4	1	4	4	4	5	5	4	
additional concerns	n/a	y	no	y	y	y	y	no	y	no	y	no	y	no	y	y	

Key to representation in Table 5.3, Table 5.4 and Table 5.5:

not at all or not very concerned: 1 2  
 quite or very concerned: 3 4  
 extremely concerned: 5

no data: no  
 additional concerns expressed: y  
 not applicable: n/a

Patrick did not fill in a questionnaire but the reader may judge this case from his synopsis. Otherwise, all of the co-researchers in my study would register positively on surveys assessing concern for the environment. Among those registering overall least concern, all are 'very concerned' about at least one issue. Perhaps strangely global warming and Ozone layer depletion, contemporary prominent issues, feature less strongly, whereas acid rain, which had at the time, I think, received less media coverage, rates more concern.

Table 5.4 co-researchers' attitudes towards trading concerns

	case study	16	05	10	11	14	15	02	04	07	09	03	08	06	13	17	12
<b>commercial and trade concerns</b>	Patrlck	Alan	Lucy	Elaine	Robert	James	Janlce	Louise	Belinda	Misha	Bob	Anthony	Peter	Natasha	Fellicity	Jewel	
<i>selling / manufacturing armaments</i>	n/a	4	4	3	5	5	3	3	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	
<i>trade with oppressive regimes</i>	n/a	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	
<i>human rights records</i>	n/a	3	4	3	4	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	5	5	5	5	
<i>adverse trade between nations</i>	n/a	4	2	3	5	1	4	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	5	4	
<i>irresponsible selling policy</i>	n/a	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	
<i>irresponsible promotional claims</i>	n/a	2	3	3	no	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	3	3	3	3	
<i>political contributions</i>	n/a	2	2	3	2	1	3	3	3	2	1	4	3	4	3	4	
<i>additional concerns</i>	n/a	y	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	y	y	no	y	no	y	



Again, all co-researchers register significant concern about commercial and trade issues. Apart from Elaine, all report being 'very concerned' about more than one issue. It will be shown as significant that Elaine reports an undifferentiated moderate concern in this area.

*Table 5.5 co-researchers' attitudes on animal welfare*

*case study 16 03 04 07 09 02 05 10 13 17 06 03 15 08 11 12*

<b>animal welfare concerns</b>	Patrick	Robert	Louise	Belinda	Misha	Janice	Alan	Lucy	Natasha	Felicity	Peter	Bob	James	Anthony	Elaine	Jewel
<i>factory farming animals</i>	n/a	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
<i>testing cosmetic products</i>	n/a	no	2	2	3	3	2	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
<i>testing medical products</i>	n/a	no	2	2	1	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	5
<i>additional concerns</i>	n/a	no	no	no	no	y	y	y	y	y	no	y	no	y	y	y

In terms of animal welfare concerns co-researchers seem far more varied in their reported attitudes than those for the environment or commercial and trade concerns. Whereas Anthony, Elaine and Jewel report they are extremely concerned on all the issues presented and add concerns of their own, Robert, Louise, Belinda, Janice and more so Misha seem to make a more conventional<sup>6</sup> divide between 'necessary' and 'unnecessary' experimentation on animals.

Alan's response, showing the reverse order of concern to many of the others illustrates the difficulty inherent in disembodied extensive surveys. Since Alan is a vegan [ala-email: 4], I may surmise, and no more, that he considers the pro-animal welfare arguments with regard to factory farming and cosmetic testing to be well established. By contrast those relating to medical testing may be seen as carrying narrow support and the issue is therefore of greatest concern. Nevertheless, all of the respondents express concern about at least one of the issues.

In terms of Bob Worcester's question: 'Which if any of the following things have you done in the last year or two? Selected one product over another because of its environmental friendly packaging, formulation or advertising'<sup>7</sup> each would be able to answer affirmatively although

at least Patrick, on the grounds that he might misrepresent himself, would be likely to refuse. Louise would see her ethical purchasing mainly in terms of simple practicality and Belinda would want to maintain traditional production but they have all in some way bought products which they believe to be or might be construed as ethically motivated. The reader can confirm this from the synopses that follow.

Thus all my co-researchers would register positively on market research surveys which seek to assess concern for the environment, commerce and trading issues and animal welfare concerns. I may therefore assume that they have concerns across the range applicable to this study and take at least some consumer action in this respect.

## **5.4. synopses**

The following pages give a 330-430 word synopsis of each of the sixteen case studies (case study 02-17). As stated, these are important quick reference points to relate embedded cases of purchase decisions. They are key in maintaining the focus level of the case study<sup>8</sup> and they are intended to aid the contextualisation of lower levels of analysis especially where cross-case analysis is undertaken. The first synopsis (case study 01) is of me. This is intended to facilitate the reader's appraisal of the research epistemology.

The synopses have a similar content and structure including photographs as set out below. They are varied, however, to avoid excessive repetition and to allow for reflecting something of the character of the co-researcher. The section dealing specifically with 'ethical purchases' is given *emphasis*.

### **5.4.1. synopsis content**

The case study number and pseudonym head each page.

*occupation:* is as given in semi-structured interview and/or confirmed in co-researchers' revisions.

*age:* young (18-32) / early mature (33-47) / mature (48-62) / retirement (63+).

Each synopsis includes:

- My subjective description of the co-researcher's home and its furnishings. The dwellings are mostly 'owned' by the co-researchers. Where this is not the case I make the tenure clear.
- A note of the co-researcher's household composition as given in the questionnaire and where necessary confirmed at interview.
- A categorisation of gross household income as reported in the questionnaire. This is given in relation to averages by household type as 'below average', 'average' or 'above average' (see chapter four).
- The co-researcher's occupation and other interests and perhaps how these relate to their lifestyle in general.
- Reference to usual transport and diet. Co-researchers may be assumed to be omnivorous unless otherwise indicated.
- *My estimation of the scope of their 'ethical consumption' is given except where inappropriate. This may indicate a percentage (X%) calculated from receipt items marked subjectively by co-researchers as 'ethical'. Only where there is a significant difference between percentage by value and by number of purchases is a distinction made. Although these figures are clearly only guides, for consistency, I refer to percentages below five as 'small', between five and ten as 'small but significant' and above ten as 'significant'.*
- *An outline is given of the type of ethical purchases included and these are primarily taken from the collected receipts. Some clarification and purchasing trends may be added.*
- Food and general provisions shopping habits / style derived from the collected receipts and (mostly) confirmed in the semi-structured interview. Where a percentage is given here I have calculated it from what I assess to be the co-researcher's general provisions receipts.

- A note on their lifestyle and any expectations as outlined in the semi-structured interview.
- A note on their philosophy of 'ethical consuming' based on the answer given in the semi-structured interview.





## **case study 01: Terry**

*occupation:* doctoral student / part time

lecturer

*age:* mature

The environs;



My house;



## case study 01: Terry

I live with my partner in our mature semi-detached house in the suburb of a town. Our house is mostly tidy and comfortably furnished. Our two sons have relatively recently left home.

We presently live on a below average income. I consider my previous work in social housing and economic development, as with my present research and lecturing, to make a social contribution. I deliberately do not have a car but walk and use a bicycle and the train to travel to and from university. My partner and I have been vegetarian for more than 25 years, and in the past, but rarely now, have been active in social and environmental demonstrations on a variety of issues. I subscribe to War On Want.

*I think potential ethical issues arise from all purchases. However, from my collected receipts I assess that I see a small but significant proportion ( $\approx 10\%$ ) of purchased items as 'ethical purchases'. This represents about a quarter of regular expenditure because of the relatively high cost of travel by train. My purchases also include fair traded and recycled paper products, eco-cleaners and a small proportion of organic vegetables. In so far as is possible all purchases, such as eggs from free range chickens, conform to vegetarian needs. However, for a further 10% of purchases I make, I knowingly contradict my ethical values. These include commercial teas and very rare purchases of Nestlé products.*

Much of my general provisions shopping (98%) is at a supermarket where my partner and I use bicycles and a trailer to transport the provisions. A few things are bought at a wholefood shop and other local stores. I am unhappy with supermarket shopping but see it as an uncomfortable compromise with time, price and range of goods.

I do not have great expectations of this 'ethical consuming' but mostly cannot bring myself to buy what I consider to be really 'unethical' products. If greater income were available some of this would be spent on things which I consider ethically doubtful such as world travel and computer hardware, some on things which are less so, like good quality cycling equipment, but, I hope, some also positively on things like a greater proportion of organic food. I do not consider myself unduly materialistic.

## **case study 02: Janice**

*occupation:* freelance health  
promotion tutor

*age:* mature

The environs;



Janice's house;



Janice's  
reception room.



## case study 02: Janice

Janice is married with three children, two adult, living at home. The bungalow is on the edge of a small town, it is detached, larger than average, and very well furnished. I see her home as the result of the pursuit of comfort and thrift rather than conspicuous consumption. Set in about an acre of well laid-out garden it has an attractive view through a mature copse to a range of low hills beyond. The family primarily uses cars for transport.

I think of Janice as an ebullient woman whose part-time profession, presently in cardiac rehabilitation, complements her beliefs. Although neither are unlimited, Janice is neither pressed for time (she and her husband have domestic and gardening help) nor for money. Her husband has an above average income from his business. He dabbles in astronomy whilst Janice collects antique bedpans.

I suspect it is of more fundamental importance to Janice that she is involved in, and commits some time to, her local evangelical church. She reads the church literature and Telegraph assiduously, asks questions about the ethics of products and services and writes enquiring letters.

*Of Janice's regular purchases she indicates a small proportion as 'ethically motivated'. I calculate this to be less than 4% by value but because they tend to be less expensive, 10% of items. This includes mostly free range animal products, fair traded products, recycled paper and cosmetic products not tested on animals. She is not, however, entirely consistent about buying these.*

Janice has a main weekly shop at a supermarket when I assess she buys nearly all provisions (>85%). Then she deliberately patronises a smaller local supermarket and other local stores. This routine is organised, Janice says, to avoid complication and choices. Janice's ethical purchasing is, I think, structured and simplified by her church membership and shopping habits. However, Janice's children, and especially her vegetarian daughter, influence her. 'Ethical' consumables will be used alongside higher quality ones as a result of complex compromises of personal and family preferences.

Janice has incorporated significant 'ethical purchases' into her shopping schedule but also adopts new practices which she feels will effect change and will contribute rather than be seriously disruptive to her way of life. Thus Janice is concerned and active in her beliefs from what she appreciates is a comfortable base.

### **case study 03: Bob**

*occupation:* marketing consultant

*age:* mature

The environs;



Bob's house;



Bob's  
living room.





### case study 03: Bob

Bob lives with his partner, Kath, her thirteen and their six year old sons in their terraced house in an inner city. I would describe their house as comfortable but untidy. They have a piscarian diet.

Because Kath is training to be a teacher and Bob is setting up a new common ownership business, their joint income is below average for a family with children. This shortage of money, coupled with the stress Bob has been experiencing during the closure of a previous cooperative business and the setting up of a new venture are dominant influences on his life.

Bob has established a number of compromises to cope with this situation. For instance, although not by choice, all of their regular shopping is done at large supermarkets to save money and time. They own 'time saving' appliances which Bob would not necessarily otherwise want. Bob drives a second hand 'economical' car but also uses public transport, for convenience, and cycles.

Family is clearly important to Bob as he and Kath will compromise because 'the family comes first'. Bob tries to be consistent in his relations with his sons. For instance, when he had promised to buy his son a particular sweet he had chosen he did so. This was in spite of the manufacturer turning out to be Nestlé; a company Bob prefers to boycott.

Bob is politically committed to 'people businesses' and opposed to big business. Although Bob does not see himself as a member of campaign groups, that type of protest was in the past, he is constructively involved in some organisations. These, characteristically for Bob, include London Industrial Common Ownership Movement. The business he is setting up has a commitment to work with not-for-profit businesses and organisations.

*I calculate from Bob's receipts that he marks a little under 10% of his regular purchases as ethically motivated. Included among these are vegetarian alternatives such as Quorn and Tofu, some organic products like bread and milk and unleaded petrol.*

But Bob does have ambitions. These, he says, may take one of two directions. He sees no virtue in being poor and unsuccessful and would like to be involved in a successful 'people business'. Alternatively, he would be happy away from mainstream business running a smallholding. At present Bob thinks his 'ethical consuming' has little effect because his expenditure is low but he says what he does do makes him feel good or, more accurately, less guilty.

## **case study 04: Louise**

*occupation:* primary school  
teacher

*age:* young

The environs;



Louise's house;



Louise's  
dining room.





## case study 04: Louise

Louise is, I think, a quiet young woman who enjoys her work teaching children at the local primary school. She is newly married and lives with her husband, also a teacher, in a modest mature terraced house. Pleasantly varied dwellings flank the street, but the area is unpretentious.

Louise and her partner live on an average income for their situation. Perhaps my most striking impression of Louise is her contentment. So when she buys furniture, a television or a music centre second-hand it is, she states, out of simple practicality: these are perfectly serviceable items at an affordable, or in some cases, give-away, price. Her choice is not part of a political campaign. When Louise says she does not want to become too materialistic the listener struggles to envision this as a possibility; Louise seems to me to be a marketeer's nightmare.

Louise attends a local church and has for some time given charitable donations, more recently through Charities Aid Foundation. She and her husband have a car but her husband cycles to work and so they do not think they will have need of another. Most (I assess >80%) of the consumer durables they buy, or are given, are second-hand and there is little in their home that could be thought extravagant.

*Louise has recently started buying some fair-traded products, mostly foods, from Traidcraft. From what she has told me I assess these to amount to about 3% of her regular purchases. She also buys bulk washing chemicals to save on packaging.*

I calculate from her receipts that almost all of Louise's regular shopping (>98%) is at a supermarket.

The impetus for new 'ethical purchasing' comes from the Church and in particular the Traidcraft representative. Louise says she does not follow the detailed arguments avidly. However, having lived and worked as a teacher for a while in an African village she has gained the insight to appreciate development issues; her home displays mementoes from her African adventure. For Louise to consider her consumer choices worthwhile, it is sufficient for her to know there will be a modest, local benefit to others. Commensurate with her practicality, however, she does not buy things she does not want or will not like. She thinks she might become more involved in thinking 'ethically' about the things she buys but already lives a materially undemanding life.

## **case study 05: Alan**

*occupation:* lecturer in human anatomy

*age:* early maturity

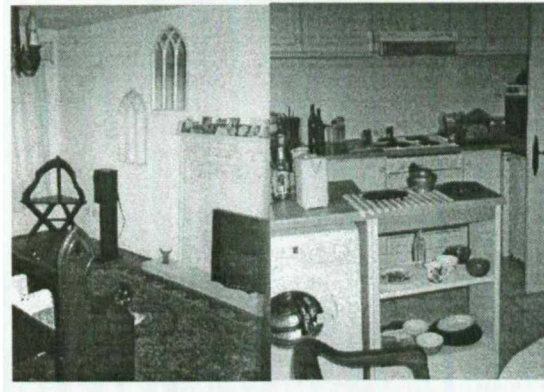
The environs;



Alan's house;



Alan's  
living room (left)  
and kitchen (right).



## case study 05: Alan

Alan lives on his own in his new semi-detached house in a mature city suburb. His house is organised around his particular needs with carefully chosen old and new furnishings. Additionally, the heating system is, for instance, installed to be energy efficient.

Alan has an above average income. Although he 'drifted' into academic biology as an occupation he has recently adapted what he does to his evolving beliefs. He was impressed in this respect with Peter Singer's book *Practical Ethics*.

Alan is a committed but not fanatical vegan. With reservations about the seriousness with which the issues are approached, he attends a local vegan group meeting. He also donates to charity somewhat ambivalently. Alan prefers taxation, and would be prepared to pay more, as a method of tackling social problems and expressing social solidarity.

Whilst Alan owns an 'off road' bicycle and a motorbike these are leisure vehicles. Primarily he walks to and from work and the city and he deliberately lives close by.

*Of course, as a vegan Alan rarely knowingly buys anything which includes animal products; indeed he will sometimes go to great lengths to locate what he wants. Although he has considered these issues for more than a decade it is in the last four years that Alan has become more involved and also, for instance, begun to buy fair trade products. From his collected receipts, he now indicates what I assess to be a little under a fifth (16-19%) of his purchases as 'ethically' motivated.*

Most of Alan's regular shopping is at a local wholefood cooperative and this is supplemented with supermarkets. This is always in small amounts suitable for carrying.

I think of Alan as approaching life in a fairly organised and precise way. He is sceptical about the possible impact of 'ethical consumption' although he does think there is a possibility of many small actions having an effect. He does want to see change in the world but prefers to think of taking a responsible attitude himself than for instance arrogantly dictating to the majority world countries what they should do.

## **case study 06: Peter**

*occupation:* management  
consultant

*age:* early mature

The environs;



Peter's house;



Peter's  
dining room  
with the furniture he made.



## case study 06: Peter

Peter lives with his partner Kath in a three storey terraced house opposite a park. Their house is deliberately furnished a little sparsely.

Peter and Kath live on above average income. He organises his work as a management consultant so that his less desirable clients subsidise his more desirable ones like FoE and the time he spends on his hobby, making wooden furniture.

Peter owns a practical station wagon. He tries to use trains in preference but he does use his car to get to inaccessible places. I think of Peter as a confident person who enjoys the contrast of his physical hobby with his paid work. Where possible he likes to buy locally crafted products. He and Kath run a joint allotment with two friends. Conversations with friends about how they should live are commonplace among Peter's circle. They attend weekend workshops and join local and national political actions, such as leafleting with the Free Tibet pressure group. These are a regular part of their life.

*From the few receipts Peter collected I suggest a small proportion ( $\approx 3\%$  by value) of their regular purchases is deliberately 'ethically' motivated. This includes cosmetics and household cleaners. It also includes some organic vegetables and a little fair traded tea and coffee. Peter indicates that a further quarter of his purchases could have been 'ethically' sourced but were not for various reasons. Peter invariably avoids Chinese produce because of that country's occupation of Tibet.*

Peter and Kath stock up at a supermarket once every four to six weeks and have a regular weekly shop at a local wholefood cooperative.

Peter has decided that the importance of his 'ethical consuming' is two-fold. Directly he believes the things he does improve the quality of his life. Indirectly he likes to think they help to make the world a better place, people being happier and healthier, but he stressed, in the long term. An immediate effect of his purchase choices could be shown, he said, by the fact that every time he used bus in preference to his car he did not pollute the air that others breathe. Conversely, some of the things he does like environmentally damaging holidays are not strictly ethical. For Peter the freedom to travel is a great pleasure.

Peter summed this up by saying that he did not want to become a 'hair shirt person' but wished to strike a balance. He particularly chose to do those ethical things which also added to his quality of life. Kath has strong views on the environment and justice and has influenced a receptive Peter. Because of this he compromises less than he used to and buys more ethically.



## **case study 07: Belinda**

*occupation:* laboratory technician

*age:* mature

The environs;



Belinda's house;



Belinda's  
dining and  
work room.



## case study 07: Belinda

Both Belinda and her husband work in the biomedical sciences; he is a senior lecturer. They have an above average income and live in a suburb on the outskirts of the city with their two teenage children. The moderately sized semi-detached house is somewhat untidy in a functional way with some rooms dedicated to academic work. Conversely, their kitchen has been newly fitted.

I think of Belinda as an archetypal empiricist who wants people to consider all the 'facts' before coming to a judgement. In this way she accepts much of modern living because she reasons it has helped ordinary people to live a much less precarious life. However, where technology risks threatening these real improvements, more rational investigation is needed before implementation. Hers is an humanist approach leading her to boycott South African goods during the years of Apartheid. Animals are less important to her than humans, so she reasons that they may be used in what she argues are limited experiments which benefit humanity. Because of its scale and potential hazards, factory farming cannot, however, be justified by the same argument.

Thus, Belinda strongly believes in progress but not at the expense of character and variety. Where these are threatened she will take some action to preserve them. She will, in line with this, in some cases buy produce locally.

Belinda is sceptical of colleagues who, as she sees it, pretend noble motives for their actions. She supports public transport, for instance, but would not use it were it not more convenient than car travel. Likewise she believes others who use environmentally friendly forms of transport do so simply because it is more convenient for them.

*Belinda says she deliberately buys milk locally. This would represent a small 'ethically' motivated proportion (I calculate  $\approx 4\%$ ) of her regular expenditure. She reports no other specifically 'ethical purchases' except locally farmed eggs and charity cards at Christmas. She would, she says buy free range meat and organic vegetables were it not for the high price.*

Belinda primarily shops at a supermarket. This is because of pressure of work and family commitments. Were it not for these she would, as previously, buy more locally.

Belinda feels she can adapt her lifestyle but only where she is strongly motivated. She has a desire to keep traditional choices and has a sense of justice that she attributes to her working class background.

## **case study 08: Anthony**

*occupation:* director / performer

*age:* young

The environs;



Anthony's  
rented house:



Anthony's  
dining room.





## case study 08: Anthony

Anthony lives with friends in rented accommodation. At the time of interview they were about to move within the area from a substantial house in a good suburb. I think the rooms were not particularly tidy but orientated to working.

Anthony has to some considerable extent organised his life around his socio-political beliefs. He has strong views about justice for humans and other animals and expresses these in his lifestyle, his work and as a vegan. Anthony says that more than half his friends are vegetarian and they often discuss the issues which interest him. He does not want to impose his diet on others and so accepts vegetarian food outside his home. His work in the media is organised to allow him to collaborate with others in presenting his ideas. He finances himself by commercial work to give time to more 'radical' productions. This however, means that he lives on a below average income for a single person and runs an old car to transport props.

At times Anthony goes to considerable lengths to achieve a purchase in accord with his beliefs and has therefore developed a specialist knowledge. When deciding where to buy things, Anthony seems to prefer an honest rogue. He will react adversely if he feels that a company is misrepresenting itself as ethically sound.

*I estimate from Anthony's receipts that he sees around a fifth ( $\approx 20\%$ ) of his regular purchases as 'ethically' motivated. This would mostly be vegan foods and cleaning products but will also include non-leather goods and recycled paper products. In addition Anthony reports that some purchases like trips by public transport are in part influenced by his beliefs.*

Anthony shops at supermarkets because he can get vegan food and they are, he says, less expensive. He would prefer to shop locally not least because he is concerned about the amount of information big companies are able to amass about their customers.

For Anthony there are two reasons for his ethical consuming behaviour. Firstly, he argues, consumer power can be effective. For instance vegetarians, which he estimates to be about 7% of Britons, have affected meat production. Secondly Anthony buys ethically in order to 'feel comfortable with himself'.

Anthony's present income is low due to the balance he strikes between commercial and radical media work. He did not think a very significant increase in his income would be likely but more money would enable him to live more in line with his ethical beliefs and, say, shop at small retailers.

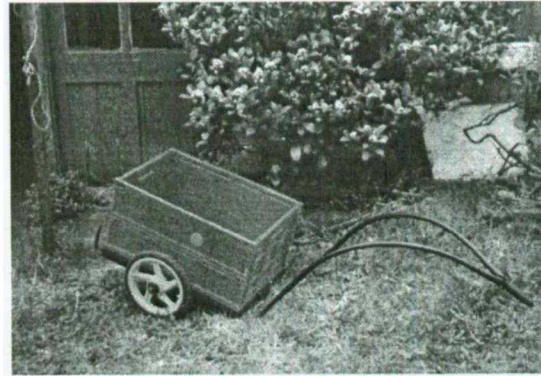
## case study 09: Misha

*occupation:* doctoral student with  
prospective employment

*age:* young

At the time of  
the study  
Misha was in  
very temporary rented  
accommodation  
so I thought it  
better to photograph  
his and his partner's bikes,  
his shopping trailer and;

the sitting room  
they temporarily use.



## case study 09: Misha

Misha lives with his partner, Joanna, and other students in a rented inner city terraced house. The house has the landlord's furnishings. When Misha completes this year and takes up employment with a pet food manufacturer they plan to move and start buying a house.

At present they have an average income but no doubt this is set to rise. Misha's research into human nutrition and his future work are only loosely associated with his ethical views. Although Misha does not have a car and at present cycles to the university, it is possible that he and Joanna will buy one when he is employed. However, he believes he will retain his commitment to alternative means of transport because they intend buying a house close to where he will work. Misha feels sufficiently strongly against the waste and pollution associated with what he sees as excessive car use to have joined in with a 'reclaim the roads' protest. Misha will take part in an occasional sponsored event but not in any long term project. Sponsored rides in support of social and political campaigns particularly suit Misha's enjoyment of cycling on a well equipped high quality machine. Whilst he has concern for environmental issues, he thinks Joanna is probably the more committed of the two.

*Reviewing the receipts Misha collected, I calculate that he marks a little over a quarter ( $\approx 28\%$ ) by value of his regular expenditure as 'ethically' motivated purchases. This encompasses a very broad range of purchases. It includes not only bicycle parts, public transport, fair traded coffee and some free range meat but also a preference for local production and goods past their sell by date that are in danger of being wasted.*

Most of Misha's shopping (90%+) is at a supermarket for convenience but he also goes regularly to a wholefood wholesaler. He has had a regular order with a free range meat supplier. He and Joanna shop using bicycles and a trailer Misha bought in Germany.

Misha's sees his lifestyle as curtailed because of his commitments to social and environmental concerns. However, he undertakes several flights abroad each year and, although he sees these as environmentally damaging, will continue them for enjoyment and because he visits his family abroad.

Misha says he gains personal satisfaction from buying 'ethically'. I see him as having a sense of international justice and wants to support what he sees as 'right'. Through this he *hopes* that some social improvements will also come about.

## **case study 10: Lucy**

*occupation:* chef

*age:* early mature

The environs;



Lucy's house;



Lucy's work room.



## case study 10: Lucy

Lucy and her husband live on an average income in a fairly new semi-detached house in a hillside suburb of the city. The rooms in their house are, I think, neatly set out and prettily furnished. She has worked as a teacher but now is a part-time chef.

Lucy sees life as something to affirm; she really loves music, especially live concerts, cooking and eating. She becomes involved in what she sees as the major issues of her time and thus the emphasis of her activity changes over time. Presently Lucy is working voluntarily with organisations that support the homeless. She used to campaign with others like Greenpeace and Amnesty. Lucy supports the concept of public transport but uses it for personal convenience. When she accompanies her husband it is usually in his car.

Generally Lucy accepts commercial assurances about the products she buys because she believes that the potential damage to a business found to be misrepresenting products acts as a deterrent. She has an omnivorous diet and, although it is not always available, prefers free range chicken.

*Lucy's regular 'ethical' purchases, which I calculate from her marked receipts to be a small but significant proportion ( $\approx 8\%$ ) include cosmetics, recycled paper products and eco-friendly cleaning products. Where she buys organic food it is she says for taste. She buys the Big Issue but not fair-traded coffee or clothes. Additionally there are things that Lucy will not do like eat at McDonalds.*

Something in the order of three-quarters of Lucy's shopping for provisions is, I assess, in a variety of supermarkets. She also goes to specialist and wholefood shops. Good quality is, she says, her prime objective here but she sees it as her duty as a wife to ensure that money is spent wisely.

She sees herself as a pagan getting close to the earth but in what seems to me a very contemporary way; material possessions are there to facilitate enjoyment *with* others. Although Lucy has an underlying unease about materialism, a celebration of life is her paramount motivation. This dictates from 'universal principles' that she should have an holistic concern for others, other animals, other things and issues which threaten life and the planet. However, it also determines that her concern, as with 'ethical purchasing', should not predominate over celebration and become a 'guilt-trip'. It is important, she says, that she should seek to be good but not perfect and that her good example should encourage others.



## **case study 11: Elaine**

*occupation:* tax consultant

*age:* early mature

The environs;



Elaine's house;



Elaine's sitting room.



## case study 11: Elaine

Elaine lives with her partner and two daughters in their detached house in a city suburban setting. The house is, I think, carefully furnished and appointed but neither uncomfortably tidy nor excessively new.

Elaine reports her family, with two employed professionals, as having an income which is above average for two adults with children. She is unhappy that her occupation conflicts with her favourable view of taxation.

The family have a car and a 'people mover'. Elaine is not entirely happy with this. However, she and her partner are keen public transport users and, for instance, take the bus to work by choice. Elaine belongs to numerous animal welfare groups, reads and picks up issues from their literature and helps with their street collections. She used to belong to environmental groups and still supports them but this change represents her priorities in descending order of concern: animal welfare, environmental issues and trading issues. So Elaine is a vegetarian who is aware of fair trade issues but, for instance, buys connoisseur coffees.

*Elaine shows in her collected receipts a small amount (I calculate <5%) of regular shopping as deliberately 'ethical' and this includes cosmetics and travel by public transport. However, all her shopping is vegetarian, she deliberately avoids holidays in 'unspoilt locations' and buys non-leather goods etc. I believe the figure of 5% alone would almost certainly understate her consumer activism.*

Because of time restrictions, almost all of Elaine's shopping is at one of two supermarkets. She says she rarely shops locally.

Elaine is concerned about other animals. Her two vegetarian daughters talk of their mother's passionate concern for animals. Elaine considers that 'ethical consuming' would be effective if enough people took part and she is concerned to be doing her bit. Purchasing ethically might, she thinks, encourage others to make beneficial alterations to their lifestyle. Writing to manufacturers and others, as she says she regularly does, will, she thinks, reinforce the message. Elaine has already made some alterations to her lifestyle in response to the issues about which she has become aware. She therefore expects to continue in this way changing what she does in line with what she sees as important.

## **case study 12: Jewel**

*occupation:* retired school teacher

*age:* retirement

Jewel's house;



Jewel's sitting room;



Jewel's kitchen.





## case study 12: Jewel

Jewel, as Julia likes to be called, and her husband live in what I think of as a 'desirable' village close to a city. Their detached house is, it seemed to me, comfortably appointed and homely.

Jewel and her husband were teachers and are now living on an average retirement income. She is an active Catholic concerned with issues such as local homelessness, international outreach and animal welfare. She and her husband have for years attended conferences and workshops associated generally with the peace and labour movements. They were recently, for instance, at a World Development Movement conference and G8 Summit Third World debt demonstration.

As retired people they have a car which they use for transport about the hilly city in which they live. However, they support public transport and Jewel's husband served as a Labour city councillor for many years working towards free public transport. Jewel and her husband have been vegetarians for many years. They have a daughter and grandchildren who are also vegetarian.

*Of Jewel's regular purchasing she identifies among the receipts collected a small but significant proportion (I calculate <8%) as deliberately 'ethically' motivated. This includes toiletries, cosmetics, recycled paper products and fair trade tea and coffee. Not all these purchases were from a Traidcraft shop. Jewel changed about the time of the study from occasionally buying fair traded coffee to always buying it. She has small 'ethical' investments.*

Jewel's husband does the shopping, under instruction from Jewel, because she does not like shopping. They now patronise the local consumer cooperative (CWS) supermarket she tells me for most of their provisions. Jewel distrusts big commercial companies and for instance, for political reasons, would not use Tesco.

Their income, Jewel says, already limits their lifestyle but Jewel enjoys living in her house, particularly its garden and access to the moors. Jewel said two things are important about her 'ethical consuming'. The first is that we should respect and conserve the earth and the second is that we should not exploit other people.

### **case study 13: Natasha**

*occupation:* occupation: shop

assistant / student

*age:* young

The environs;



Natasha's house;



Natasha's sitting room.



### case study 13: Natasha

Natasha lives with her partner and others in the inner city suburban terraced house she owns. From what she tells me I think of her as a gregarious young woman with a strong inherited sense of social responsibility balanced by an occasional need to be 'frivolous'.

She presently lives on a below average income. Life for Natasha is to be thought of holistically. The education, voluntary and paid work therefore which she undertakes is always associated with her ethical views. She has studied chemistry and environmental geology, worked in a wholefood cooperative, the Citizen's Advice Bureaux and is now hoping to train as a solicitor specialising in human rights.

The recent change from long term vegetarian to vegan illustrates Natasha's evolving lifestyle. From feeling excluded by her views for many years she now sees herself as integrated into a group, the discussions and practices of like minded people. Natasha sees her consumption as moderate because she is not very materialistic. However careful she is with what she consumes, and there are dilemmas which arise for her, she is mindful of acquaintances who she says take these things too seriously.

Natasha uses public transport to travel about, does not own a car and expresses strong opposition to their extensive use. The information Natasha needs to make decisions comes from copious reading of magazines like New Internationalist, The Vegetarian and Ethical Consumer.

*From the receipts Natasha furnished I assess that she sees about forty percent by value ( $\approx 60\%$  quantity) of her purchases as influenced by her ethics. These include wholefoods, some of which are organic, vegan products, second hand products including clothes, managed timber and recycled paper products and public transport. Natasha mostly notes her 'frivolities' as those purchases where she could have acted ethically but did not.*

Spending a little under ten pounds, Natasha shops weekly at a wholefood cooperative. She also spends about the same amount in supermarkets but here has an irregular pattern of where and when she shops.

Natasha is conscious that she will make some compromises in life. However, she does not think she has aspirations which will conflict with her ethics and is not inclined towards a very materialistic lifestyle. She feels it is important for her to be doing something however small the impact and believes someone will benefit from her positive choices. Also the awkward questions she asks will contribute to change.

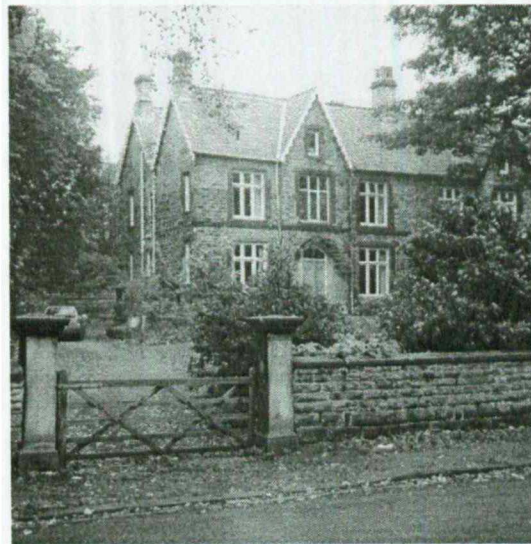
## case study 14: Robert

*occupation:* voluntary services  
adviser, lay inspector of schools  
and academic

*age:* mature

The environs  
(looking from the  
poor to affluent area);

Robert's house;



Robert's kitchen  
where he says  
he spends  
much of his time.



## case study 14: Robert

Robert lives with his wife, who is also a professional, and family on an above average income for the household size. They own what Robert will point out is a generously proportioned and comfortable Georgian house on the border of affluent and poor parts of the city. It is adequately but not, I feel, ostentatiously furnished. Living only a street away from a poor inner-city area, which Robert refers to as his local shops, he says he 'feels the tension as regards inequality'.

When Robert moved to the present house he took the role of 'house husband'. Since his children have grown, he has shifted to full employment; all 'selected for the public good'.

Robert reports eating less meat than he used to but enjoys what he eats. He does not own a car and takes some pleasure in say turning up to a schools inspection on his bicycle. This enjoyment is heightened by arriving wet from rain.

*Robert's regular purchases shown by the receipts he collected should perhaps be viewed in two ways. I calculate that the items that Robert marks as ethical account for about a quarter ( $\approx 24\%$ ) of his expenditure. These include fair traded tea and coffee, locally baked bread, locally bought fruit and vegetables, and some free range products. About a quarter of expenditure, not necessarily coinciding with the 'ethical items', is at local shops and Robert marks this activity as ethically motivated.*

He derives pleasure from other things than material possessions and says, I think plausibly, that he becomes bored easily with conventional shopping. Between the time when Robert collected receipts and our interview, his shopping habits changed. Robert said that, although his wife still does some of the weekly shopping in a supermarket, he now does much more in small local stores.

Robert says he is concerned with the broad picture. He will therefore not give inordinate attention or value to a particular purchase to the detriment of 'right living'. He allows himself some 'luxuries' like chocolate.

Robert is a Methodist who makes 'ethical purchases' primarily as part of the 'outworking' of that Puritan tradition which has a bedrock of ethics. In this way he says he can assert that it is wrong to despoil the environment or to dominate others. He will not want to value material things above people and will react adversely where he believes this to be occurring. It is he says important for the survival of such values that they are vigorously supported.



## **case study 15: James**

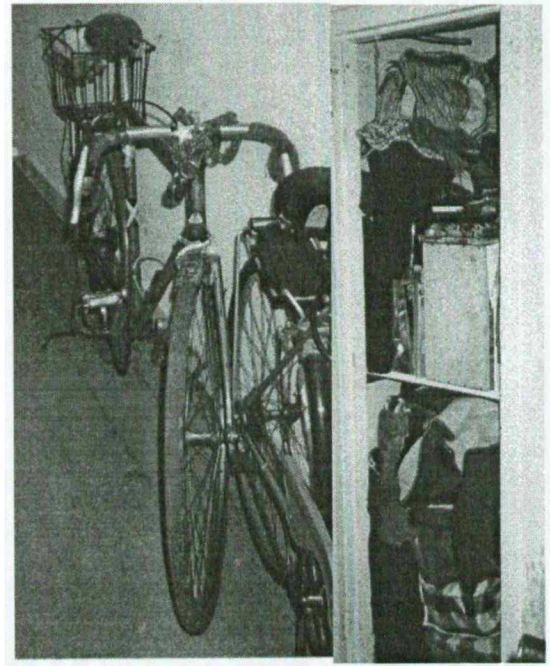
*occupation:* sometime cycle mechanic  
and baker

*age:* early mature

The flats where  
James lives temporarily;



James' bicycle (left)  
and the cupboard (right)  
housing his possessions.



**J**

## case study 15: James

James lives with his brother and sister in a rented flat on a rundown council estate close to a main road. The flat is comfortably furnished but apart from his bicycle, all James's possessions are stored in a relatively small cupboard.

James has no need for a car but uses his bicycle extensively. He has many routines such as morning meditation, 'giving labour' at a local bakery and a local bicycle shop, and riding in a regular mass cycle event. This still leaves him flexible to respond to events such as interviews with researchers.

James is a vegan. However, he occasionally travels abroad and has been to India and Nepal. Here because of what he sees as the reverence and more considerate treatment of other animals he would, in such societies, be vegetarian or even omnivorous.

*I estimate that at least two-thirds of James's food shopping is organic produce. In the light of genetic manipulation, James plans to increase this to all possible purchases. His 'ethical purchases' will also include cleaning products, toothpaste, natural fibre clothes and non-leather goods. However, all James's few purchases seem to me to be carefully considered in some way.*

James's material needs are small and provided for by what he shows as an income of about £40 a week. This money is considered by James to be a responsibility which he aims to dispose responsibly on mostly organic produce from a small business, ethically sound comics, which accounted for a third of expenditure for the month of receipt collection, and the like. Almost all James's shopping (I assess 93%) is in health/wholefood shops/cooperatives or at market stalls. None is in major supermarkets.

There are few tensions in James's life but some which give him 'gibber' or cause for thought. He may, for instance, want to turn a well meant generous offer from his parents into an acceptable purchase for him.

James's life I think is to be understood through his spiritual approach. He says he is concerned with how he himself lives because he is able to control that but says he no longer wants to change the world. This is, James feels, the result of a progression in thought from conventional ideas through protest to his present lifestyle. James tries not to have expectations. I think he seems to place more emphasis on what he does, dancing, acting and his relations with others, than what little he consumes.

## case study 16: Patrick

occupation: amateur social

philosopher (*my description*)

age: young

The environs;



the house where  
Patrick has a flat;



Patrick's living room.





## case study 16: Patrick

Patrick lives, he says reclusively, alone in the flat he owns in a substantial four storey inner city semi-detached house. I felt the flat was furnished very unpretentiously. It was, I thought, organised around Patrick's needs in a way that superficially made it appear untidy.

Presently, Patrick has a below average income supplemented with state benefit. He undertakes paid manual work only when he has a special need; he has inherited and expects again to inherit money from his family. Patrick does not have a car and uses train and cycle for frequent expeditionary journeys mostly into the shire counties. Patrick says he can be an assertive cyclist. When younger he had been 'indirectly' involved in protests but now considers it crucial for him to maintain a low economic and environmental impact.

*Some of what Patrick buys, like Soya substitute and eco-friendly washing products, is he says because of habit from 'stricter' times . He buys organic milk, wholemeal foods etc., partly because this conserves the traditional farming environment. However, Patrick finds the notion of buying particular 'ethical products' problematical because he feels it impossible to extricate appropriate products from the entwined ownership structures. For Patrick these purchases are, therefore, far less important than his overall low consumption level. Because his commitment to a low consumption level (Patrick calculates his monthly expenditure to be < £200) exceeds his concern with what he consumes and the understanding that some purchases are 'ethical habit', Patrick did not indicate 'ethical' purchases on his collected receipts.*

Most of Patrick's shopping is at supermarkets, in small quantities and arranged around his trips. He also goes regularly to a wholefood shop and accepts discarded or 'wombed' produce.

I found Patrick to be an expansive and knowledgeable conversationalist. He is concerned that traditional ways and environments should be respected and only changed very slowly to maintain social continuity. He has a passion for observing and recording traditional conditions in the widest sense.

Patrick's lifestyle is organised to accord with his evolving views favouring slow change especially conserving and respecting social and physical history. He has lapsed from more politically passionate times but strictly within a framework of deliberate low consumption. He expects to inherit money, and whilst he has no specific plans for this time, feels a responsibility to use the inheritance wisely. This he says could, for instance, include running an organic small-holding.

## **case study 17: Felicity**

*occupation:* solicitor soon to

become a barrister

*age:* early maturity

The environs;



Felicity's house;



Felicity's living room.



## case study 17: Felicity

Felicity lives with her partner, Claire, and Felicity's teenage son in their substantial three storey terraced house in an inner city suburb. To me the house seemed homely and to have a comfortable jumble of furniture and bric-a-brac. Felicity and her partner are both professionals and have an above average income for their situation.

In her work Felicity specialises in immigration and human rights law. I see her as an energetic and gregarious woman happily involving herself in, and initiating, 'radical' projects like a regular women's disco and running a weekend sign language course. Both she and Claire have 'old' cars; necessary for some of these activities. Where she thinks it possible, for instance for work, Felicity uses public alternatives. By her own admission she is at times inconsistent; Claire is the 'organiser'.

*However, Felicity has been consistent with some long term consumer activism. She says she has always supported the Nestlé boycott, not eaten in McDonalds since the McLibel case and, although she has decreasing need for most of their products, has long supported the Body Shop. So, apart from an occasional frivolous vanilla milkshake from Burger King, Felicity feels she is unlikely to buy anything that offends her views, although in her receipts she identifies only a small proportion (I calculate <2%) as specifically 'ethical' purchases. These matters are very much part of family conversation.*

There is no set pattern of shopping to which Felicity conforms. She and Claire have a more or less regular order of organic vegetables from a local shop. Otherwise, Felicity buys when she needs and wherever is convenient including supermarkets. Claire is more systematic. When younger Felicity was a vegan and then vegetarian. She is now a low meat omnivore buying Quorn, because she likes it, and RSPCA approved 'freedom foods' where possible.

Felicity has not always been so financially secure. In her younger days she lived in a squat and practised plumbing. Her assertion that she and Claire were not so materialistic that their lifestyle might conflict seriously with their philosophy was, I think, convincing. This generation has a responsibility to future generations, Felicity believes. Although she thinks she does not do enough in this respect it is, she says, better to do something than nothing.

## 5.5. chapter conclusion

I think it is important to acknowledge that during the field work I necessarily became to some extent emotionally involved with co-researchers. By this I do not mean that I am incapable of rigorous analysis but that it is a consequence of, and necessary to, the depth of analysis that I should be sufficiently involved with each case study; understanding follows sympathy. I am to present *their* case; render my co-researchers understandable. Consequently it is important for the reader not to suppose 'scientific objectivity'. As I have argued the quality of my analysis depends on the openness and logic of the process. I am now ready to proceed to analysis.

notes and references:

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- <sup>1</sup> I am aware that there would be other motivations to join the study. Lucy, for instance, seemed thrilled to be studied, hanging on to rather than returning the synopsis I sent her for approval [Appendix L]. However, I would argue that the more significant motivation is a belief in ethical consumption as expressed subjectively by co-researchers in the semi-structured interviews.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Reclaim the roads' mass cycle demonstrations occur regularly and 'spontaneously' in many cities in the affluent world. Dates and meetings are flagged up on the WWW.
- <sup>3</sup> See 'in search of G. F. Tamberoni'.
- <sup>4</sup> This possibility was discussed in a meeting with Tim Lang early in the study.
- <sup>5</sup> Mintel (1994).
- <sup>6</sup> I suggest 'conventional' here in line with the Cooperative Bank's survey finding that most of its customers are more concerned with 'unnecessary' experiments on animals.
- <sup>7</sup> Worcester (1996).
- <sup>8</sup> This is in order to try to adhere to Yin's (1994) imperative that findings from multiple case studies should be understood within the context of each of those studies.

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## **6. decision making in an apparently daunting environment**

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In this chapter I draw directly from the data to present findings pertinent to the study of key questions about decision making. Whereas in the next chapter I seek to understand the motivation co-researchers bring to their overall ethical consumption as individuals, here I concentrate on how the embedded decisions are made.

The first part deals directly with co-researchers' ethical consumer decisions within a framework of the abbreviated processes and procedures predicted by bounded rationality theory. The second explores the limitations and compromises made by individuals in an apparently daunting decision making environment. I aim primarily to present the data. My main conclusions are developed in chapter eight.

### ***6.1. bounded rationality: making the decision***

Although the decision processes and procedures are mostly presented here, for clarity, as if they were discrete and clearly bounded by their definition (set out in chapters three and four) they are of course inter-linked. Explanations of particular decisions are almost always to be framed in complex terms. For example Robert's purchase of a personal pension plan can be seen as a search and '*satisficing*' because he did collect comparable literature from a number of sources. But it can only be understood in relation to the '*context*' relationship with those who were pressing him to make the purchase, '*imitating*' the recommendation of an adviser, and the near '*intuition*' based on some vaguely remembered prior knowledge.

In this first section I will set out the findings under six headings working broadly from the most active search to the apparently most passive habit. The first deals with searching and satisficing, the most deliberative process. The second is imitation of trusted others; the third group of findings includes general and domain specific rules; the fourth, intuition; and the fifth adaptation to environment in habit. In the last group of findings

context rationality is explored. I found hardly any examples of process rationality in the data and therefore no separate category is accorded here.

#### **6.1.1. searching for products and services**

None of the co-researchers searched comprehensively to satisfy perfectly formed preferences; I didn't expect them to. There are numerous examples of *satisficing* that need to be examined. However, in a few cases the-would be consumer went to surprising lengths to locate what they wanted. The most extensive related to me was Alan's quest for his perfect motorcycle boot [ala-email: 2-19]:

*Although motorcycling is inherently risky it seems silly not to take sensible precautions. Stout footwear is acknowledged as being important in preventing serious foot damage in minor accidents. I didn't want to buy leather boots (being a vegan) but this looked difficult as lots of products proudly state that they are real leather. Over a period of 3 months I visited no end of shops and leafed through catalogues. Most of the shop assistants thought I was crazy. A few race-style boots are made of Lorica<sup>1</sup> but have leather lining. During this time a magazine reviewed a range of boots, including these Lorica ones and found similar abrasion resistance. Despite this they STILL said that leather offered the best protection! This is a common opinion, usually held without any evidence.*

*A local dealer, sympathetic to my search suggested that I contacted a small manufacturer in North Yorkshire who did specials to order. They said (after a little hesitation) that they would try to make some from Lorica if I found the material. I can't remember the details, but after a number of phone calls I found the number of the UK distributor of Lorica and persuaded them to sell me a mere 1.5m. They told me that this was really being done as a favour as they usually sell large lengths (to the Vegetarian Shoe Co I suppose). Nonetheless they charged a substantial handling fee!*

*Eventually the boots were made, a manufacturing flaw repaired and used now for 2 years. They are great boots, and although they haven't been tested in a crash they are good in every other aspect. They were quite expensive and needed a lot of determination to obtain. They feature on my WWW page and I have had a dozen queries about them. I keep thinking of ordering a number and reselling them.*

Alan's preference was clear: stout non-leather motorcycling boots. Following an extensive, and I think impressive search, including he estimates at least twelve stores [ala-ssi: 131-132], Alan takes the advice of a selected dealer to contact a manufacturer. He goes to some lengths and cost to get what he wants but is making informed judgements at each stage to limit the range of his next move; the search must be presumed not to be exhaustive.

Overwhelmingly the narratives I selected as indicating that the co-researcher had undertaken some search were more limited and concluded with *satisficing*. In other words the first acceptable option, or at least an early option in the possible process, was taken.

Perhaps the most instructive of the few cases where a search was said to be impossible because of lack of information was where Belinda, preferring non-irradiated food, complains [bel-att: 9-13]<sup>2</sup>:

*There is never any indication on the p...packaging this has been done. There is no indication either the if vitamin content of the food is the same as if it were fresh.*

*The same applies to genetically ma...manipulated ce...cereals especially Soya which is incorporated into most food stuffs. It is impossible to make any ethical choice as there is no information made available.*

Belinda habitually shops in a supermarket. Facing the same situation but buying from the local market or one of his usual wholefood shops, James solves his problem by increasingly buying organic produce [jam-ssi: 5-7]. Similarly, Peter discusses the matter of

locating suitable produce, sometimes further afield, with the staff of his local wholefood store [pet-ssi: 174-179]:

*The vegetables Peter buys come, he said, from Leeds. He knows this because of discussions at Beanies where he shops. When I asked him whether Beanies tell their customers this kind of information he said that they did have notices about but that it was as likely that he had asked them in this case. Beanies did initiate checks on products themselves he said. For instance they had written to manufacturers of products containing Soya beans to ask if they had used genetically modified beans. Peter said that Plamil had assured Beanies that they did not whereas Granoise said that they did not intend to exclude modified plants.*

Both Peter and James consider they have or can sort out suitable produce. Belinda's dilemma is clearly not explained, therefore, simply in terms of a failed search. We need to understand why she restricted herself to supermarkets and was not content with buying organic produce which she could be reasonably confident would not be irradiated, but these issues must wait.

Co-researchers may frequent places where information pertinent to ethical consumption is made available which then seems incidentally to affect purchases. Bob, for instance, characteristically wandering about the Charities Fair chanced upon the Unity Trust stall [bob-ssi: 32-34]. He had been looking for a suitable business bank account, was unhappy with the Cooperative Bank and unable to find a workable account with Triodos. With similar misgivings Natasha wanted to move from the Cooperative and was attracted by a Triodos advert in Ethical Consumer. As Bob had found, Triodos had no suitable account. Natasha's search remains pending whereas Bob settled on Unity Trust Bank. Significantly therefore, many ethical consumers may be thought to make 'general searches' and come upon solutions *satisficing* outstanding problems. Similarly Elaine picked up an investment idea from an advertisement in *Outrage* magazine, Misha had seen fair traded coffee in Oxfam shops but it was only when he started looking for a good percolator brand that he



thought to combine his ethics with taste, and James was moved to increase the proportion of organic produce he buys following an article in the Independent [ela-att: 7-8; mis-ssi: 80-92; jam-ssi: 26-29]. Comparable situations occurred with Robert and Felicity [rob-ssi: 103-106; fel-att: 108-111] although these, for various reasons, did not lead to actual purchases. The extent to which we should consider such embedded cases as searching varies but they imply that we should, at least in some cases, portray the ethical consumer as active. Thus, although James was not actually looking to change his buying pattern in a particular way in the above example he is clearly deliberately receptive to information which might have that effect.

Some searches are in ignorance as when Peter and his partner Kath scanned the shelves of a supermarket for a powerful but not too environmentally damaging cleaner. Peter admits they had little idea what to avoid or endorse but must have felt a duty to try [pet-ssi: 164-165]. Others search with considerable knowledge. Bob with a long history in the wholefood trade knows what he is looking for on food labels, Anthony knows who sells non-leather shoes in his city [bob-ssi: 103-105; ant-ssi: 68-70].

Some searched for a sign. 'Kitemarks' such as Freedom Foods [jan-att: 7-11; fel-att: 12] are sought after by supermarket users. Similarly the new environmental rating on some white goods was used [rob-att: 233-41; luc-ssi: 146-148] but very much within the context of other concerns like cost. Natasha used the mark denoting timber from managed woodland [nat-att: 22]. Such marks abbreviate searches but because others have deliberated on the ethical issues the consumer's 'guess' is about the trustworthiness of others. These cases, I would therefore argue, may more usefully be thought of as *imitation*. I will consider these as well as searches through magazines and trusting the advice of specialists under *imitation* although especially if that advice is added to other information rather than followed slavishly it could just as well be considered here.

One final point before moving on. We should not think of all searches as being initiated by the consumer requiring a new or improved product. What I shall describe as ethical

deterioration is an important stimulant. Demutualisation (ethical deterioration) of the building societies, for example, caused an upheaval in the financial services market and much activity by Robert [rob-att: 76-80]. We may presume many ethical consumers were similarly affected.

Not all those in the study undertook searches in the sense of having specific requirements and actively seeking products that met them. And I speculate that searches are often not 'completed'. Under pressure to locate a suitable pension, Robert says he collected written material that he 'never followed up' [rob-att: 166]. These alternative embedded cases will be discussed below.

### **6.1.2. imitation: the role of others**

Here I am concerned with ethical consumers' trust in the judgement of others both in terms of establishing the nature of action to be taken and the relative importance of the issue to be addressed. I shall start with the familiar concept of a *boycott*. I have taken this to be imitation since others investigate and present their recommendations and the consumer joins, or not, on the basis of limited knowledge and/or respect for the primary or secondary promoters. Most of the co-researchers were involved in boycotts [6.1.3] though to differing extents. Using the example of what is probably the most well known current consumer boycott, that of Nestlé, the following illustrates the point. Felicity, Lucy, Natasha and I see ourselves as strict adherents whilst Bob, Misha, Jewel, Peter and Robert usually apply the boycott. Although Alan and Belinda do not boycott Nestlé, they express reservations about the company's activities. Louise, James, Anthony and Elaine made no specific mention of the company although at least in the case of James his buying pattern would make a boycott superfluous. Additionally such actions may become routine and not be mentioned in narrative or interview. Joining a 'respectable' boycott saves the consumer having to consider and weigh all aspects of the issue although it is usually necessary to know enough to be convinced of the correctness of the action. Felicity said she had boycotted Nestlé since the action began, more than ten years ago she thought [fel-

ssi: 122], whilst Janice was just reading an article in the current issue of *Tear Times* about the baby milk issue [jan-ssi: 172] and may be joining the action. Jewel usually subscribed to the boycott but admitted, like Patrick [pat-ssi, 175-176] that she did not know if the action had been lifted [jew-ssi: 33-36]; fatigue in long running actions?

The suggestion that a *boycott* simplifies decisions must however be qualified. Bob, for instance, spends much<sup>3</sup> of his comprehensive audio-tape narrative agonising over whether or not to buy 'offending' Nestlé products [bob-att: 123-125, 143-148 & 162-182]. Additionally Felicity finds product identification increasingly difficult [fel-ssi: 49].

Less familiar is the *buycott* and, in Friedman's<sup>4</sup> strict sense of a deliberate, organised campaign to favour purchase of a particular product, or patronise a given outlet, little direct evidence of such action was found amongst my co-researchers. One example might be Janice's understanding that the church magazine she most reads, *Tear Times*, implicitly suggested readers change their bank account to the Cooperative Bank (or one other, the name of which she could not remember) [jan-ssi: 169-171]. However, the closely linked procedures of choosing *approved products* and from a *pre-selection of products* are apparent. In Friedman's terms we may think of these as *quasi-buycotts*. I shall consider the two in turn.

In some cases particular magazines seemed to be a prime or only source of *approved products* for an ethical consumer. In these cases the nature of the magazine seemed to me, and not unexpectedly, to be closely related to the co-researcher's current primary concerns. Thus Janice relies heavily on the religious magazine *Tear Times*<sup>5</sup>, Peter on *Clean Slate*<sup>6</sup> published by Alternative Technology Centre, Elaine less exclusively on *Outrage*<sup>7</sup> the magazine of Animal Aid, while *The Law* keeps Felicity up to date on the McLibel case. By contrast, Natasha accesses a more eclectic range including *Ethical Consumer*, *Vegan*, and *New Internationalist*. In other cases consumers solicit advice or use 'ethical kite-marks'. For instance, Elaine contacted the Vegetarian Society about shoes and was referred to Marks and Spencer [ela-ssi: 81-82]. Felicity said she thought the RSPCA's 'freedom foods' mark

to be trustworthy when she buys meat [fel-ssi: 7-8]. In all these cases respect for the promoter (of the magazine or mark) seemed to me to be key.

Not infrequently ethical consumers choose from a *pre-selection of products*. These would include catalogues from Oxfam used by Bob's partner [bob-ssi: 6], or more esoterically of organic seeds [pet-att: 8-9] and clothes by Peter's partner from Racing Green and Free Tibet [pet-ssi: 3-4; pet-ssi: 122-125]. Alternatively the Tradecraft *selection* might take the form of a catalogue and representative or shop [lou-att 3-4; jew-ssi: 16-17; rob-att: 34-5]. Also under this head I would want to include trusted retailers. Local wholefood stores (often cooperatives) and other similar retailers are mostly [pet-ssi: 147-149; nat-att: 3-4; ala-ssi 24-25], but not unfailingly [fel-att: 20-26], seen as effectively pre-selecting in terms of ethical produce, even by one who does not use them [bel-ssi 106-108]!

The final procedure I want to consider here is the *imitation of 'significant others'*<sup>8</sup> both in terms of what the other person does and advice about what they should themselves do. Significant influences include friends and acquaintances<sup>9</sup> [ant-ssi: 113-114; bob-att: 40; fel-ssi: 66-71; jan-ssi: 10-11; jew-att: 34,87; lou-att: 2-3], as well as parents [ant-ssi: 108] and offspring [jan-ssi: 11; rob-ssi: 70-71]. This influence can be general with, for example, a dietary issue that in turn changes buying patterns over a range of products, or specific, where a particular product purchase is copied.

In some cases imitation acts additionally as a confirmation procedure. 'It's ...erm... a decision [buying and enjoying Tradecraft tea and coffee] which is quite in keeping with the ...er... the ethos I find at the church and amongst some of my friends as well, so no real consuming difficulty on this front.' [rob-att: 47/8]. In a more proactive sense, networks of friends and acquaintances may become what Peter described as a 'lifestyle laboratory' [pet-ssi: 156]. Such social interaction may be a vital source of discourse for the would be ethical consumer but may be tinged with a hint of repression as in Natasha's facetious reference to a 'wholefood Mafia' [nat-ssi: 11].

The imitation procedures I have described are not of course independent of each other so for instance Anthony ‘found out from a friend that the One Earth Shop in Birmingham sold vinyl leather look’ [ant-att: 19]. His friend had solved his non-leather clothing preferences by accessing a trusted shop’s *pre-selection* and subsequently sported a new belt. Anthony, knowing his friend to be strictly vegan, *imitated* him. Likewise Peter’s partner’s knowledgeable friend introduced them to a catalogue *pre-selection* of organic seeds [pet-att: 8-9]. The combinations are legion. I additionally want to note that Anthony and Peter have in the cases cited above the cumulative reassurance of relying on a respected friend and perhaps *intuitively* being able to trust an outlet that, respectively, markets no animal products or only organic products.

A final twist to this story of imitation is, of course, that ethical consumers themselves become ‘significant others’. In the most contemporary manner, for instance, Alan transmits his experience of producing Lorica motorcycling boots. He says: ‘They feature on my WWW site and I have had a dozen quires about them.’ [ala-email: 18/9].

### **6.1.3. heuristics: the rules of ‘ethical consuming’**

Unlike imitation where purchases can be readily associated with the approval given or selection made by respected others, understanding co-researchers’ heuristics seemed altogether more complicated. Whilst I feel it is possible to identify heuristics and moreover theorise that, because a significant<sup>10</sup> number of co-researchers express very similar opinions, these might hold some general currency, there could be no ‘rule book of ethical consuming’. The knowledge necessary to judge whether an heuristic is applicable may be eschewed, fine lines appear between the situations in which a given heuristic may be said to apply or not apply, the application of an heuristic by a given co-researcher seems variable, in a given situation different co-researchers will apply apparently contradictory rules and employing the same rule in the same situation different co-researchers exhibit markedly different behaviour. These issues will be illustrated as I present heuristics common to the example group.

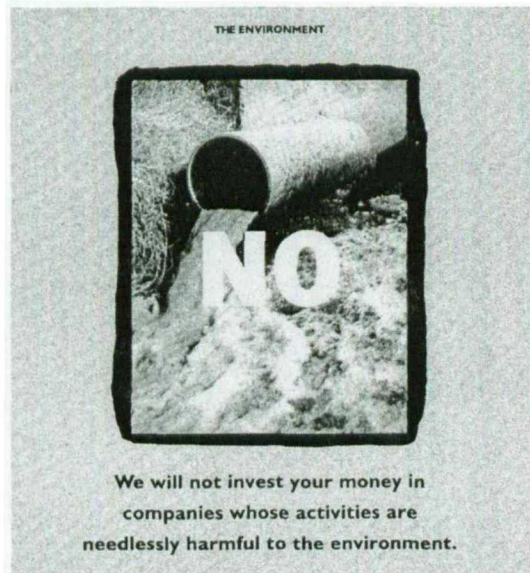
Having been cautious in the introduction to this sub-section I would suggest that some clear-cut decisions may be based on heuristics. The rule: *exit from apparently 'duplicitous' producers* for instance may be discerned in relation to McDonalds and Nestlé. Denials of supposed<sup>11</sup> wrong doings [ant-ssi: 15] or repeating violations when agreement to desist has been reached [bob-ssi: 57] elicit strong adverse reactions. A company's general trading behaviour may be seen by some consumers as reprehensible but what seems at issue here is the *subjectively* viewed credibility gap between company activity and rhetoric. The reader should not suppose that the co-researchers that most routinely boycott these companies would do so regardless of perceived misdemeanours. Felicity, for instance, said she loves 'delicious fillet of fish' at McDonalds [fel-ssi: 138] but has not eaten one since the McLibel case began. Natasha, and we may suppose other vegans, 'gave up' After Eights<sup>12</sup> [nat-ssi: 57]. In deciding which fast food outlet to reluctantly patronise in situations where he had no other choice, Anthony prefers Burger King to McDonalds [ant-ssi: 13]. Thus although for some like Lucy and James such boycotts were habitual [luc-letter: 13; jam-ssi: 53] consumer decisions were affected by pleasure preferences and not only at the margins of consumption as in Anthony's case.

The rule is applied, of course, elsewhere where the perception of passing off questionable practices as ethical can fall foul of ethical consumers in varied but related ways. Anthony and Bob are concerned that the vegetarian healthfood facade of Holland and Barrett, and ethical policy of the Cooperative Bank respectively belie their reality [ant-ssi: 95-96; bob-ssi: 30-31]. The former, Anthony tells us, is in the ownership of a meat producer and the latter is, at least in part Bob laments, exploiting a profitable niche. A similar perceived inconsistency may arise when the owner of a reputable business, in Jewel's story Tesco, is convicted of a socially reprehensible crime, gerrymandering [jew-ssi: 8-11]. A sector which apparently earnestly attempts to address real human distress, although the cause derives from the sector's own activities, receives approbation for dishonesty. Peter levelled this charge against the pharmaceutical companies [pet-ssi: 134-135] who, he

argues, profit from both the cause and relief of pain. In all these cases it seems to be a *supposed* mismatch between a company's reality and rhetoric that constitutes the notion of duplicity.

The converse: *reward 'honest ethical entrepreneurs'* seems to be adopted by many. Anita Roddick's campaign against animal testing is to be approved and rewarded by patronage, according to Elaine [ela-ssi: 65-67], in spite of the Body Shop's less than satisfactory policy. The Cooperative Bank's 'firm' ethical stand [mis-ssi: 105; jan-ssi: 169-171] and the Triodos Bank's policy of positive investment [nat-ssi: 94-96] are likewise to be rewarded. Natasha approved IKEA's restraint in setting but not overstating an ethical policy [nat-ssi: 32-35]. Even entrepreneurialism with only a hint of green technology may be considered ethical favourable by a consumer [jan-ssi: 140-145] as is the case with Dyson vacuum cleaners.

**Figure 6.1 Cooperative Bank's ethical policy 1996**



However, the ethical entrepreneur's role is a precarious one; the boundary between ethics and dishonesty or duplicity is imprecise and may be mediated by overarching concerns. The cases of the Cooperative Bank, IKEA and Body Shop illustrate this well and I shall address them in turn. In the case of the Body Shop the situation with regard to the testing of products on animals is a further complication which I will handle elsewhere.

The Cooperative Bank, which attracts the approval of Janice and patronage of Misha, is by no means wholeheartedly supported. Bob and Robert have accounts at this bank but express considerable reservations because of its commercial position [bob-ssi: 28-31; rob-ssi: 90-91]. Perhaps this is best summed up by Robert saying, after commending the bank, that '... the Cooperative is still a bank, it's

still part of the banking system, still part of the system which, in effect, discriminates ...erm... against the poor and whatever the trappings of ...of ethical banking it really can't escape that reality.' [rob-att: 124-126].

While Misha said he '.... don't think any of [the other banks] matched the Co-op for commitment to ethical investment' [mis-att: 85-86] and held a positive view of its policy, Natasha '.... don't really think the environmental standards of the Co-op Bank are, to be honest, all that high really. I think ...erm... people who unnecessarily pollute is a very stupid statement and one they should possible be shot for really ....' [nat-att: 37-39]. The similar statement I found in the publicity literature is shown in Figure 6.1. Jewel's experience of being offered non-ethical investment in a supposed ethical bank led her to question the policy [jew-att: 17-19].

Natasha's approval of IKEA and disapproval of B&Q is similarly revealing. She sees decisions to buy from both retailers as marginal in the sense that furniture and fittings are for her rare purchases. For this reason Natasha felt less constrained to act in accordance with her beliefs. She was attracted to IKEA<sup>13</sup> primarily because of their furniture design and B&Q on price. Both companies have an environmental sourcing policy. However the fine judgement in favour of IKEA as the more satisfactory ethically rests mostly on the notion of honesty. IKEA she tells us sets high environmental standards but acknowledges that only three products fully comply [nat-att: 26-27]. Intuition seems to intervene here in Natasha's acceptance that this is not a double bluff.

Louise, Lucy, Peter and Felicity patronise and generally approve of the Body Shop because of some or all of its environmental and trading policies and positive animal rights stance. Felicity's support is singularly robust. Although she has little need to use the shop she reacts against what she sees as the injustice of attacks on Anita Roddick. She strongly empathises with the business woman on two counts: Anita is a *female* and *Jewish* entrepreneur. Elaine and Jewel have misgivings about the enterprise but, on balance, are concerned to reward 'ethical entrepreneurs' and so occasionally shop there.



By contrast both Anthony and Patrick disapprove of the Body Shop and invoke, for them, the over-riding rule: *eschew the consumerist ethos*. Both cite the wide range of products to be found in Body Shop [ant-ssi: 84; pat-ssi: 51-52] as implicating the venture in consumerism. Anthony finds further evidence of this in the shop's promotion of the 'beautiful woman' stereotype [ant-ssi: 85]. Jewel's doubts are founded on a similar concern. The Body Shop in her city relocated, she tells us, to a more *commercial* location [jew-ssi: 82].

These concerns are not restricted of course to the Body Shop and B&Q. Excessive promotional advertising on television may be taken as signs of implication in the consumerist ethos. Such perceptions, for instance, cause Misha and Robert from their different perspectives to be sceptical about a product or retailer and shop elsewhere [mis-ssi: 103-104; rob-ssi: 86-87].

A very common theme among co-researchers is '*small is beautiful*' and its variants. These are closely tied to misgivings about consumerism. Small is associated with simplicity, being of comprehensible size and choosing the mundane. Favouring small business, or avoiding big business, was a strong but not universal theme [bob-ssi: 86-87 & 102; jam-ssi: 17-18; luc-ssi: 15-16 & 110; rob-att: 147]. Three preliminary and important points are of value here. Firstly, this ubiquitous stated preference for small retailers seems rarely to be reflected in practice (see Table 8.1 co-researchers lifestyles and synopses in chapter five). Secondly, there is an associated concept of small businesses being understandable and therefore more amenable to evaluation as responsible or otherwise [pet-ssi, 129-134; jam-ssi: 77-81; rob-ssi: 135-137]. Finally some co-researchers specifically said they preferred 'alternative' or collective, cooperative outlets [bob-ssi: 26; mis-ssi: 73-4,110; jew-ssi: 12-13; rob-ssi: 155-158].

Simple packaging was cited as either desirable in itself or as an indication of a suitable product [bel-ssi: 131-132; ant-ssi: 108-110]. Preferring the mundane emerged in a range of forms. Elaine chooses holidays in 'run of the mill' locations to avoid despoiling

environments, Felicity contents herself with basic services, James tries 'not to buy processed food' [ela-ssi: 127-130; fel-ssi: 124-132; jam-letter: 20-21]. This stated preference for the small and simple may manifest itself at different levels with different effect. This can be illustrated by Robert's and Misha's commitment to cycling. Whereas Misha indulges in this simple, environmentally sound form of transport using sometimes elaborate equipment, Robert eschews esoteric equipment [mis-ssi: 37-38; rob-ssi: 85-88].

Closely related is Bob's, Lucy's and Louise's [3 3 3 10] stated preference for durable products and Bob's, Natasha's and Louise's deliberate use of second-hand goods [3 3 3 1]. For James, similarly second hand-clothes were important to reducing his material impact but increasingly he also wanted these to be of natural materials [jam-ssi: 52-55]. Selecting 'natural' goods produced in 'traditional' ways figured in a number of narratives [3 3 3 2/3].

Possibly at variance with *small is beautiful* is the notion of preferring well known makes on the expectation that their products will be ethical because of the companies' need to maintain a reputation [ela-ssi: 6-7; jan-ssi: 63-64; luc-ssi: 69-72, 79-80].

An anomaly became apparent with regard to an heuristic about 'reading' pricing. Low price was considered in some circumstances a possible indication of unethical production [3 3 3 12] and yet in others the reverse [nat-att: 64-72; mis-att: 9-11]. It seemed that low prices of products originating from the Majority World *might* indicate poor wages and the ethical consumer should therefore prefer products manufactured in affluent countries. On the other hand an heuristic was apparent (possibly originating from the animal rights movement) advising ethical consumers to buy as cheaply as possible to leave no surplus for misuse in say animal experimentation.

A final caveat to apply to the notion of heuristics. In so far as heuristics are applied they may frequently be subject to what Anthony refers to as the 'violation principle' [ant-ssi: 75-78]: an ethical consumer will act only on known problems. Anthony illustrates this in

relation to the companies Gillette and Wilkinson. He tells us that he knows of Gillette's product testing on animals but says he knows nothing about Wilkinson's policy. He therefore prefers to buy from the latter and 'make no *special* effort' to find out more information [ant-ssi: 77]. Heuristics may, as in this case, be used in relation to a special situation but of course only in relation to *known* factors. They may also offer a general rule as in preferring small and simple but there are clear embedded cases where such ideas are overruled.

#### **6.1.4. using intuition and prejudice**

Here I am concerned with less tangible approaches: what the co-researchers as experts 'expect', 'speculate', 'assume', 'believe', 'surmise', 'hope' and 'trust' to be so and of what they are 'suspicious' and 'sceptical'. Concepts of intuition are particularly difficult to define and differentiate. For example, the heuristic which suggests *small is beautiful* is to some extent founded on an intuitive understanding about supposed poor ethical practice and large corporations: 'large monopolies are not famed for their ethical behaviour but you really don't always know' [jew-att: 58-59]. Additionally intuition seems to work in conjunction with other procedures. For instance, I might suggest there is a degree of intuition underlying the trust which allows ethical consumers to imitate others. Such behaviour is not, and of course could not be, based on complete information but rather on 'mature and practised understanding'<sup>14</sup>.

What seems an important factor here is that ethical consumers extrapolate quickly from incomplete and often oblique information or reasoning [ala-ssi: 39-42; ant-ssi: 123-125; bel-ssi: 27-30; bob-ssi: 106-107; fel-att: 14-16; jam-ssi: 8-10; jan-ssi: 148-151; mis-att: 85-86 and ssi: 107-109]. Some diverse examples will illustrate the point. Alan says he trusts the wholefood cooperative he patronises because of their past practice in boycotting the products of apartheid and the variability of their prices which seemed to him to indicate a direct and understandable relationship between producer and retailer [ala-ssi: 20-29]. Knowing that the cooperative would be making ethical decisions and having reason to

believe that he would, from limited experience, broadly approve of these he intuitively thought he could trust what he bought there. As he points out such trust must be speculative because he cannot know for instance if fairer trading was beneficial, whether it gave the primary producers what *they* wanted [ala-ssi: 20-22].

The butcher Felicity patronises advertises organic meat. However, she intuitively doubts the validity of the claim based on what she thinks of as the high fat content of the meat [fel-ssi: 5-8] although such doubts are insufficient to stop her shopping there. Janice 'presumes', because she doesn't know, *Mastersun* holidays ensure destination hotels pay fair wages because the organisation is Christian based [jan-ssi: 90-92]. Janice has begun to consider alternative holiday suppliers having discovered the low wages paid to staff during her last vacation [jan-att: 106-114]. Clearly such extrapolations have some rationality but are not watertight.

Because I tended to press co-researchers to consider the basis for their consumption behaviour, I may have been generating post-hoc rationality. Certainly there were occasions when a co-researcher resisted my approach. Anthony for instance added to my record of our interview that he felt some (non-)purchases to be 'a gut instinct' [ant-ssi: 155-156]. On the other hand, and here advertising executives will find some solace, vaguely remembered ideas may be remarkably robust in underpinning decisions. Here I am thinking of the case of Zanussi when Bob found himself reluctantly agreeing to buy a dishwasher [bob-att: 58-66].

*Each time Mol brought it up I blocked the idea but when Mol had arranged to go on ... erm ... a.. full-time education course, that is to become a teacher ... erm ... the argu... her arguments became overriding and I caved in. However, knowing that Zanussi are known for being much more environmental, in a sense, in their use of water .. erm ... I did insist that that's the sort we got or at least one ... erm ... with ... er ... an equivalent low water usage.*

*I suppose time was the most w..was the overriding factor here ... erm ... Mol was aware that we take... using a lot of time ... erm ... cleaning-up and hoovering and whatever and she needed for us to have some aspect in the household speeded up so that we've got more time to look after children, and ourselves and do work and whatever ... take the stress out of life.*

Bob and his partner Mol bought a Zanussi dishwasher based on an extrapolation from little information. What Bob remembered was an assessment of *washing machines* in *Which?* magazine that could have been as much as ten years old. The article, *Which?* found and reviewed for me<sup>15</sup>, did not entirely endorse Zanussi as the most environmentally efficient machine although water consumption was low and it featured as a 'Best Buy'. Bob's was a doubtful guess therefore both that the manufacturer had stayed at the leading edge of technology in a swiftly changing white goods market in the past seven years and that what was partly true of one range of products was applicable to others. What is interesting in this respect is that Robert in what we might very reasonably categorise as a rational search bought a Zanussi washing machine after consulting the same magazine, *Which?*, in the local library. If the information they read was not conclusive, I wondered, were they additionally influenced by Zanussi's 'appliance of science' adverts that I remember as running some years ago?

Is Robert right to construct from such accumulations of scantily remembered ideas a notion that ethical consumer prejudice could be beneficial? Robert argued that he didn't have to have certain knowledge to make a decision but could rely on his prejudice to guide him [rob-ssi 130-132]. Most, but significantly not all, of my co-researchers were, I might suggest, prejudiced against multi-national companies as discussed above. Whether such a prejudice is well founded is in one sense subjective but in a broader context is related to a contemporary social debate. I shall of course return to this but suffice it here to note the ability of ethical consumers to act despite flimsy knowledge.

### **6.1.5. adapting habits: conservatism and radicalism**

Habit is essentially conservative of course. Janice speaks of her habitual pattern of shopping as necessary to prevent her from being overwhelmed by choice [jan-ssi: 74-77]. From the shopping patterns I discerned from collected receipts and narratives and which co-researchers verified, I would suggest that more are habitual like Janice than impulsive like Felicity [fel-ssi: 4-5]. In these examples of ethical consumers therefore habit seems important and once established it is by definition resistant to change. Misha's KitKat habit is, for instance, mildly at odds with his limited support for the Nestlé boycott [mis-ssi: 147-149] but unlikely to change.

The value of establishing particular ethical purchases as new habits was as important to Janice with her fair traded items as with James 'getting his head around' paying more for organic produce [jan-ssi 18-19; jam-ssi: 4-7 & 62-63]. Once established such habits may become so commonplace that they are hardly remembered as originally conscious decisions [for instance luc-ssi: 2; ant-ssi: 138-139]. Here I was especially thinking of dietary changes where not all co-researchers who had changed their diet for ethical reasons mentioned it in their first narrative as relating to ethical purchases, though all mentioned it indirectly. In the case of Jewel, I still was not clear until she corrected my synopsis of her case [Appendix I]. For this reason, habit might be a more important aspect both of resistance to, and establishment of, ethical consuming that is apparent here.

Two further comments about habit I think are important although they are each mentioned by only one co-researcher. The first is that in the restlessness of consumer capitalism habits can be difficult to establish. Having found a satisfactory pair of 'vegan shoes' Alan tells us he had hoped to repeat his purchase by mail order only to be informed that the styles had changed [ala-ssi: 113-115]. Conversely, Patrick for whom ethical consuming has declined in importance still retains some of his previous habits buying soya protein products and *Ecover* eco-friendly cleaning products [pat-ssi: 99-100 & 53-56]. Both these have since attracted potential ethical issues against which some

consumers have reacted, soya in terms of genetically modified strains and Ecover as a company part owned by GROUP4<sup>16</sup>.

#### 6.1.6. relating to others: mothers, daughters, fathers, sons

In considering context rationality I shall primarily note family relationships because the role of others beyond the family has been considered in the sub-section on imitation. Here co-researchers behave in a way which cannot be explained entirely by reference to what I have learned about them as an individual. Because the rationality of their behaviour is to be found in their relationship to others this is of particular importance in the explanation of supposed words/deeds inconsistency. It is apparent from the data that family relationships are of central interest to a consideration of decision making and to aid the discussion Table 6.1 sets out co-researchers circumstances in terms of life stages<sup>17</sup>. By differential shading, I indicate the numbers of family members potentially influencing my co-researchers.

**Table 6.1 Life stages**

<i>Single</i>	<i>In relationship</i>	<i>In a 'permanent' relationship</i>	<i>Young family (supporting children)</i>	<i>Mature family (working children)</i>	<i>Grown offspring</i>
Alan	Misha	Louise	Belinda	Janice	Jewel
Anthony	Natasha	Lucy	Bob	Robert	
James	Patrick	Peter	Elaine		
			Felicity		

Parents, of course, influence their ethical consumer offspring. Not only those who live primarily on their own or with flatmates as do Alan, Anthony, James and Patrick, but also some in established cohabiting relationships such as Natasha, Lucy and Felicity give some time in their narratives to the significance of their parents [for example: ala-email: 45; ant-ssi: 46-48; jam-ssi: 41-45; pat-ssi: 157-158; nat-ssi: 152-154; luc-ssi: 58-59; fel-ssi: 165-166]. Even the mature Robert gives a cursory mention of his father as influential in one purchase [rob-att: 158-160]. In some cases co-researchers acknowledge their parents as important or prime sources of their attitudes towards ethical consumption. Anthony, for instance, has a vegetarian mother and a father committed to public transport, Felicity's

parents are communists, Natasha's mother has, she tells us, passed on a strong sense of justice exemplified in a long commitment to fair trading and Lucy remembers her parents' boycott of South African products during the apartheid years [ant-ssi: 46 & 55-58; fel-ssi 125-126; nat-ssi: 152-154 & 178; luc-ssi: 58-59].

These are not however simple relationships of influence towards ethical consumption and approval. Tensions between offspring and parents in these examples are common.

Relating to peripheral purchases, Alan speaks of compromises between his veganism and his parents' wishes when he buys pharmaceutical preparations for them whilst James compromises on food when he visits his parents. More fundamental problems can arise however as when Natasha clearly anguishes over her mother's offer of a car for her to drive to university. She [nat-att: 84-90] sees this as a:

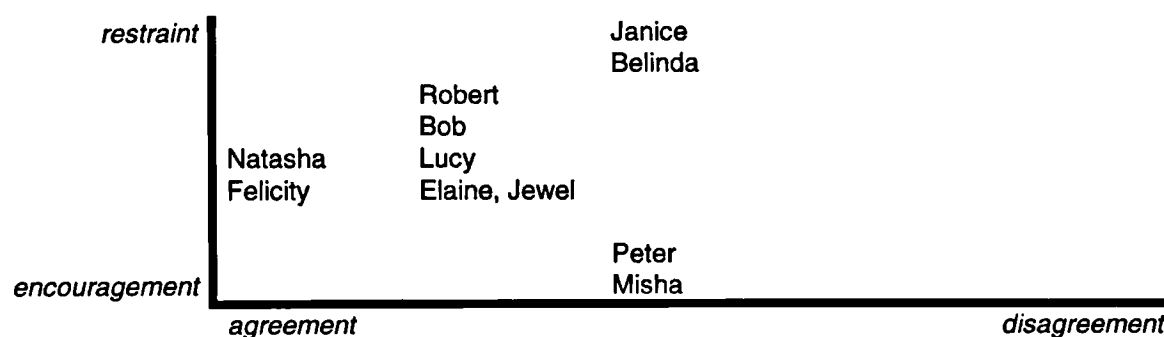
*real ethical dilemma about whether I should offend my mum and say look, I don't want the car because I can commute just as easily on the train or the bus or whether I very graciously accept the car off my mum.*

What makes such a situation more pressing is that Natasha finds cars 'awful and terrible' but otherwise holds her mother in some esteem.

If family background may be influential, partners<sup>18</sup> are crucial to understanding ethical consumption. Partners' influence may tend to encourage the practice, perhaps taking it beyond the behaviour the individual would otherwise adopt, or it may tend to suppress such tendencies. The situation suggested by the case examples is complex but I begin by offering, in Table 6.2, my broad assessment of the degree of agreement between partners and the evidence of encouragement or discouragement my co-researcher receives.



**Table 6.2** *partner relationships and their effect on co-researchers' ethical consumption*



I think there is good evidence that both Belinda and Janice would make more ethical purchases were it not for their strong willed sceptical spouses [bel-ssi: 168-169; jan-ssi: 154-156 & 170-171]. Jewel, Elaine, Robert, Lucy and Bob all speak of unethical purchases they make or take part in which they would not on their own account have made. Natasha and Felicity have partners who seem to be compatible in terms of ethical consuming although Carol, Felicity's partner, being a more organised and less spontaneous person goes about the project in an entirely different way. Both Misha and Peter have 'better halves'. Misha perhaps sums this up for both of them when he admits that Julie, his partner, 'had been, and remained, a strong influence on him [being] more 'strict' than he and he would probably 'not do so much' if it were solely up to him.' [mis-ssi: 68-69; see also pet-ssi: 40-43].

However this picture of encouragement or restraint, agreement and disagreement is sometimes complicated especially where partners' differing philosophies lead to differing ethical consumption. Examples of these situations include Robert's agreement with his wife about banking but disagreement about transport. Similarly Bob balked at his wife wanting to buy a dishwasher but was encouraged by her to buy organic produce. Obvious tensions are caused here at times of decision making. At a more general level however such consumer differences may be symptomatic of tensions between partners' philosophies or willingness to make changes.

Because adults are compelled to make decisions about material well-being it is perhaps easy for children to taunt them about hypocrisy [jan-ssi: 134-135]. Felicity's family provides an example where Nigel, her son, berated her partner for buying organic vegetables in a disposable plastic bag. But the banter flows both ways with Nigel being accused (wrongly) of buying a Nestlé product and, in another case, giving way to a partiality for pork pies [fel-ssi: 27-29, 47-49 & 42-43]. Again, as with partners, there may be differing concerns. Janice says 'there may be a difference of emphasis between her and her children: they on animal rights and her on recycling.' [jan-ssi: 98-99]. We may conclude that children may often be 'great campaigners' [jan-ssi: 23].

Even grandchildren are in the frame. Jewel and her husband are, I eventually found out, long term vegetarians. Their granddaughters also are but their grandson is, Jewel says, decidedly not [jew-ssi: 55-56]. When the grandchildren come to stay Jewel's husband buys [jew-receipts], and she prepares, one meat dish.

Perhaps in conclusion I can usefully return here to the understanding of Belinda's difficulty in locating non-irradiated food and non-genetically manipulated cereals. The explanation may be partly in her supermarket shopping habit and commitment to progress, but surely also in her husband's doubts about organic produce [bel-ssi: 168-169]; the 'solution' used extensively by James and to some extent by others [jam-letter: 19-20]. Although Belinda appeared to me to be knowledgeable and assertive, her husband is the academic; we might say the senior thinker. In part, his doubts may prevent Belinda finding a solution.

## **6.2. *bounded rationality: limitation, compromise and context***

I have argued that the role of ethical consumer seems exceptionally daunting, and, if Charles Jennings (chapter one) is to be believed, bewildering and off-putting to the new-comer. I have already referred to examples of ethical dilemmas that even experts find

taxing. In this section I am concerned to describe how co-researchers perceive, if at all, that complexity, allocate attention and, if necessary, inform themselves about the issues.

### **6.2.1. issue complexity and irresolvability**

Much of my data will come from the semi-structured interviews. Here I asked directly about the complexity of issues which consumers faced and in this sense I set the agenda. However, I will start by comparing two approaches taken from the audio-taped narratives where co-researchers were invited to offer purchase stories. In these there is less researcher direction. The product discussed in these extracts, first by Jewel and secondly by Alan, is fair traded beverage [jew-att: 1-3; ala-att: 26-32].

*Erm... CaféDirect coffee which I buy at the Tradecraft shop where I work as a volunteer. Erm... that satisfies, that satisfies my ...erm...er... beliefs in fair trading. It tis more expensive so sometimes I do find it's a bit difficult.*

We cannot tell from this extract if Jewel is simply not mentioning any misgivings. However, the matter seems fairly uncomplicated: she supports fair trade and, when money is not too constrained, she buys appropriate products. Alan's narrative is quite different.

*I very much like drinking coffee and used to be particular about buying speciality beans roasted by a local tea and coffee merchant. Then I got more into the 'ethical consumer' thing and thought that I should buy Traidcraft/cafe Direct or the like to at least give a higher price to growers. This is only a partial solution as I don't know if such products really benefit the grower any more than beans on the international market, the coffee is NOT as good as that produced locally, and I often think that I shouldn't be buying something that is grown as a cash-crop and thus depriving the growers of growing real food.*

Here the whole purchase, although made, is fraught with practical sacrifices and difficulties, ethical uncertainties and reservations. Even here Alan might have added the

issue of food miles, and whether or not international trade is in the longer term beneficial to Majority World countries. There are two aspects, I suggest, to the difficulty. One, as Alan points out elsewhere in his narrative [ala-ssi: 20-23], is that the consumer could not reasonably know all the facts. The other, made more difficult by the former, is a matter of judgement as to which is the better course.

What is perhaps remarkable therefore is that both Jewel and Alan have bought, in this case CaféDirect. And that all other co-researchers manage, as ethical consumers, to make similar decisions. If we construct Jewel's decision as *imitation* then we are saying that she trusts Tradecraft, Oxfam and the Fairtrade Foundation, the co-sponsors of the product, to have made these calculations on her behalf. I have considered this above and will return to the point.

Most co-researchers feel that in practice when actually buying something, as opposed to theorising, they personally have a paramount concern [ant-ssi: 186-192; ela-ssi: 80-81; luc-ssi: 106-110; nat-ssi: 186-188; pet-ssi: 163-167; rob-ssi: 173-174]. Elaine's prime concern, for instance, is animal welfare expressed where possible by avoiding animal products but otherwise by trying to ensure she buys products which cause little harm. This does not mean that she has no other concerns as can be seen from Tables 5.3 to 5.4. The allied notion that co-researchers associate key issues with given products I present more speculatively. That Jewel, like Janice and Louise, seems, when buying beverages, to concern herself only with fair trade may indicate that the producer has successfully constructed the ethical brand such that other considerations, for instance air miles, monocropping etc., are effectively excluded.

Drawing on both Boudon and Dahlbäck (see chapter 3) I could suggest that there is a relationship between the importance in which a concern is held and the attention given to it. This need not, as above, be a simple correlation between an issue and one particular purchase. Both Misha and Peter, for instance, suggest that they respond more favourably to purchases that appear satisfactory to them with respect to a number of ethical issues

[mis-ssi: 176-178; pet-ssi: 168-137]. Others, when asked, support their behaviour on a complex of reasons [ant-ssi: 82-87; rob-ssi: 78-81]. However, such an approach is complicated when the consumer has accepted a less than satisfactory general situation. I infer, for example, from Anthony's analysis of supermarkets [ant-ssi: 97-107] that the advantages and disadvantages he sets out, which under other circumstances could be very important to him, are trivialised because he sees these shops as far from ideal anyway [ant-att: 34-36]; he has made a general compromise in shopping there.

But I also see co-researchers as deliberately not engaging as consumers in some issues that otherwise I would have thought to be important to them. These seem to me to confound any simple relationship between perceived importance and attention given. Co-researchers often argued that although we are morally obliged to respond to those matters which can reasonably be resolved, to act only in some cases is better than to become embroiled in conundrum and minutiae. Such views are expressed often in metaphor [ant-ssi: 186-192; bel-ssi: 38-42; bob-att: 163-190; fel-ssi: 27-29; jam-ssi: 113-114; jan-ssi: 68-71; jew-ssi: 128-131; luc-ssi: 37-40; nat-ssi: 187-189; pat-ssi: 41; pet-ssi: 241; rob-ssi: 108-113]. Action will necessarily, therefore, involve compromise, flexibility and balance. To construe this as ethical consumers taking the easy decisions would receive some support from the data. Indeed Janice honestly says she enjoys comfort and this constrains her more radical consumer decisions [jan-ssi: 119-121]. Nevertheless we should not overlook the imperative to action contained in the couplet, ethical consumption, and the fact that action *is* taken seemingly against self-interest.

For some therefore, complexity is diminished because of the nature of their engagement with the ethical consuming; their 'project'. So, whilst Robert, for instance accepts that all sorts of dilemmas arise from his move to buy from small local shops, he is able to argue that overall morally this is the best option. This does not mean he is unconcerned about the shortcomings of local businesses but he is able to act within a satisfactory framework [rob-ssi: 49-52; 148-150]. Similar constructions for dealing with complexity, but with

different detail, can be suggested for James' project to favour the small scale and Patrick's consumer minimalism.

For others complexity is resolved by accepting the discourse of others. Jewel had for good reason *bought into* the Christian social justice discourse and thereby had potential problems resolved for her. Janice and Louise subscribed to the similar discourse of their churches, Peter to those of FoE, Greenpeace and the environmental campaign groups and Elaine to the animal rights discourse [jan-; lou-; pet-ssi: 181-183; ela-ssi: 11 & 28].

Revealingly, Natasha says that things will be less black and white now that she is leaving work at her local wholefood cooperative [nat-ssi: 57-60]. Perhaps Anthony is more immersed in such a political discourse than any of the others.

I should not imply that ethical consumers always find ways of resolving knotty conflicts. Bob's agonising narratives about buying commercial coffee in cafés or letting his son have a Nestlé product because he had unwittingly promised it to him would restore the balance [bob-att: 163-190]. Even the capricious Facility worries whether she had the right to try to influence her secretary's unethical choice of confectionery [fel-att: 66-77]. Deep contradictions do surface but do not inevitably prevent action; mostly these ethical consumers cope. My analysis of these strategies for coping will form a major theme within chapter eight.

### **6.2.2. how is time and attention given to ethical consuming?**

How does a person's volume of consumption affect their decision making? How do the problems and approaches of those who consume little compare with those who consume more? This is important in relation to the sustainable consumption debate. Two of the co-researchers in this study, James and Patrick, say they quite deliberately limit their income, expenditure and therefore their material 'footprint' [jam-ssi: 176-177; pat-ssi: 195-199]. Since this is by choice they may be thought of as 'downshifTERS'. Some, like Peter, claim to make only those changes in terms of ethical consuming that enhance their life. Most of my co-researchers think of themselves as making some sacrifice by introducing ethics into

their purchasing decisions and to some extent reduce their consumption. The key question for me is how this affects their ethical consumption.

**Table 6.3 estimated expenditure and number of decision opportunities in a four week period**

no.	name	occupation	expenditure per item < £100	
<b>co-researchers with above average income</b>			expenditure	decision opportunities.
11	Elaine	tax consultant	£468	425
02	Janice	therapist	£1,120 <sup>iii</sup>	336 <sup>iv</sup>
07	Belinda	lab. technician	£515	313
17	Felicity	solicitor	£739	248
06	Peter	management consultant	£520	237
05	Alan	academic	£646	173
14	Robert	academic	£749	117
average			£680	264
<b>co-researchers with average income</b>				
09	Misha <sup>i</sup>	postgraduate	£420	204
12	Pamela	retired teacher	£397	193
10	Lucy	chef	£219	128
04	Louise	teacher	£345	92 <sup>iv</sup>
average			£345	154
<b>co-researchers with below average income</b>				
03	Bob <sup>i</sup>	consultant	£282	183 <sup>iv</sup>
13	Natasha <sup>i</sup>	student	£280	146
08	Anthony	actor	£175	62
16	Patrick <sup>ii</sup>	amateur phil. (unemployed)	£94	60
15	James <sup>ii</sup>	occasional cycle repair / baker	£176	38
average			£183	90

Notes:

i: hopes for and/or expects higher income in the future.

ii: deliberate restriction of income and expenditure.

iii: the figure excludes significant expenditure over £100.

iv: percentage of receipts collected estimated by researcher.

The collected receipts give an approximation of *regular provisions expenditure*, primarily on consumables, and the number of points where a decision was or could have been made over a four week period for each co-researcher. Table 6.3<sup>19</sup> shows the results arranged in three income bands.

Clearly regular day-to-day expenditure varies within these groups but rises in accordance with a general increase in income. The number of potential opportunities to test one's ethical consumption practices also increases with income. I estimate that those among my examples receiving above average incomes generate about three times as many decision

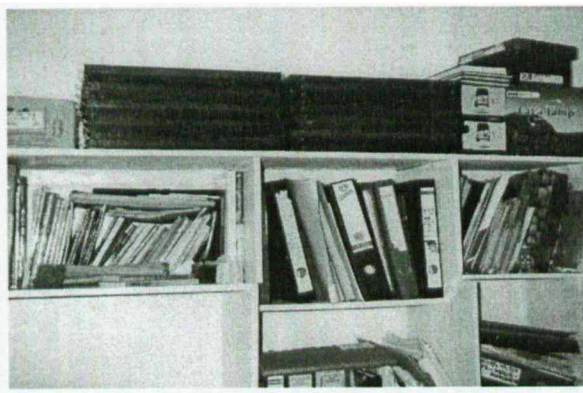
opportunities as those on low income and nearly three-quarters as much again as those on average income. A factor of ten distinguishes the 'downshifter' from those meeting the most decision opportunities. If, as I have discussed, co-researchers limit their engagement with ethical consumption, then 'downshifting', not surprisingly, is effective in this respect.

For Patrick low consumer expenditure is sufficient of itself. Aside from some residual habits he gives little attention to ethical consuming and argues that the situation is anyway too complicated to be resolved satisfactorily. Conversely James (and I suspect that Olivia would have proved similar) is concerned that his money is responsibly spent. Although the issues he faces may be seen as complex, as he is currently most concerned with genetic manipulation of foods, his decision making seems relatively manageable. Apart from his comics he mostly purchases unprocessed food and increasingly buys organic almost exclusively from a wholefood cooperative.

It may be, I speculate, that the total amount of *active* ethical consuming in which a person can engage is limited. By active I mean consuming to which attention is given, for instance, to keep in touch with the evolving ethical discourse. However, I will develop and justify this argument in chapter eight.

### 6.2.3. what is the role of information / communication?

*Figure 6.2 Anthony's bookshelf*



Examining ethical consumers searching, very occasionally at some length, for what they want could overstate the significance of information acquisition and sifting in the consumption process. Some of my co-researchers, Anthony for instance, may be seen as immersed in

information as his bedroom bookshelf testifies (Figure 6.2). He can, for example, without reference recite the difference in the percentages of vegetarians in the population as



calculated by the Vegetarian Society and, alternatively, the Government. Others, we might conclude however, do not need information. Although, for instance, Robert does use information he is somewhat scornful of the rational approaches of which his wife approves [rob-ssi: 34-37]. His strategy (although he would not be happy with such a military term) requires broad strokes in preference to detailed informed searches and at

**Figure 6.3 Peter's shopping guides**



present directs him simply towards small local shops. He prefers to use 'prejudice' [rob-ssi: 130-131], perhaps the swiftest of decision procedures, which he sees as the accumulation of wisdom. Patrick, in a similar manner,

unable to untangle the web of over-production, requires no information to 'downshift'. Additionally some information is collected but rarely, if at all, used. Peter and Natasha directed me to dusty shopping guides on their bookshelves (Figure 6.3).

Moreover, and this is important to my thesis, (new) knowledge can be shown to be mediated by a number of factors before it influences behaviour. These factors include, at the least, individuals' relationships, situations, desires and general philosophies. I will use four different situations to illustrate the diversity. Janice on learning from her church about issues of Majority World debt and the advisability of reconsidering bank accounts, notes that in her *relationship* finance is a matter for her husband. Although Peter is well aware of the environmental damage caused by aeroplanes, he *desires* to continue to enjoy holidays abroad. Likewise, Misha's family live in Israel and in this *situation* he will continue to visit them. Belinda particularly selects documentary media relating to her academic interest in food; she values for instance The Food Programme. She discusses issues which impact on consumption and ethics with colleagues. She says she is quite concerned about factory farmed animals. However, I would strongly suggest that her behaviour is to be understood by an overriding *philosophical* concern for mass good life

mediated within family relationships. With these important provisos, communication can be shown as a contributory feature of ethical consuming. My co-researchers were invariably linked into networks of friends, family, associates and organisations where discussions of relevant issues were, to varying degrees, common.

*Table 6.4 co-researchers' stated connections*

<i>no.</i>	<i>name</i>	<i>network</i>	<i>media</i>	<i>research</i>
05	Alan	<b>friends &amp; acquaintances active in local vegan society, colleagues &amp; family</b>	Guardian, Independent, Radio	as part of work at university
08	Anthony	friends	Guardian, Independent, TV (documentaries)	as part of work in theatre
07	Belinda	<b>family &amp; colleagues</b>	Telegraph, TV (documentaries)	
03	Bob	<b>colleagues in the alternative business network</b>	Radio 4 (not TV) (would take NI, EC & V)	
11	Elaine	family and friends	Guardian, TV (documentaries) <b>Outrage</b>	
17	Felicity	<b>political family</b> , friends, lifestyle	TV (documentaries), The Law, incidental magazines	
15	James	friends, 'wholefood shop gossip' [jam ssi 83-85]	Independent / occasional anarchist paper	
02	Janice	<b>church</b> , family & friends	Telegraph, Tearcraft, TV (documentaries)	
12	Jewel	<b>labour / peace movement</b> conferences, workshops & fairs, within church and between religions & friends	Guardian / Observer TV (documentaries) Radio 4	(previously as teacher)
04	Louise	church friends	possibly media influence	(teacher)
10	Lucy	<b>campaigns and leaflets</b> , conversations, husband's church	Big Issue, Virgin Radio (newspapers)	
09	Misha	friends & flatmates, colleagues and allotment culture	Independent (previously Guardian) corporate info.	
13	Natasha	wholefood Mafia, friends, allotment culture	Ethical Consumer, New Internationalist Big Issue, Vibes corporate info.	
16	Patrick	Bikeshop discussions (squatmates)	TV (inc. OU)	
06	Peter	friends, environmental & political organisations, allotment culture	Clean Slate	
14	Robert	church	Guardian / Observer, New Internationalist (not TV) Radio 3	

Note: co-researchers are presented alphabetically to avoid any suggestion of categorisation. An entry has been placed in *research* only where a co-researcher has specifically said that some research they have done has contributed to their understanding of issues as an ethical consumer.

In Table 6.4 I present the connections co-researchers told me about and have tried to indicate some idea of importance by placing first those that seemed to me to be stressed

more or frequently mentioned. Where I assess there is particular influence I have emboldened the entry. This should however only be taken as indicative.

What strikes me about these data is not just the variety of combinations of sources and connections but also the particularity of sources: the radical solicitor, Felicity, following McLibel in *The Law*, James' human network circulating snippets of relevant news, Janice's Christian *Tearcraft*, Peter's environmental concerns through *Clean Slate* and Elaine's animal *Outrage*. Unsurprisingly they are connected to their favoured social discourses. Nonetheless I shall suggest that some co-researchers exhibit more diverse connections than others.

Likewise, networks of friends, which most co-researchers agreed could be significant in shaping behaviour, were often portrayed as particular. 'One's friends Jewel thought tended to hold similar views and so there were a range of people who would influence her and who she would influence.' [jew-ssi: 113-114]. Alan's friends held he said 'similar or convergent views', and this would go for Anthony with more than half vegetarian or vegan friends and Bob networking with cooperative business associates [ala-ssi: 190-192; ant-ssi: 133; bob-ssi: 91-92]. James described a similar situation but cautioned me on placing too much emphasis on such a *circle of like minded people* [nat-ssi: 156-158] when he referred to having 'mixed friends' (some of whom also ate meat) [jam-ssi: 110-112]. In Peter's case he went so far as to consider his friendship network to be a 'lifestyle laboratory' [pet-ssi: 155].

Even well connected people, however, could be ill or uninformed as ethical consumers. Jewel having been immersed in relevant campaign movements all her life said that she did not know whether or not the Nestlé boycott had been lifted [jew-ssi: 33-36]. Although the same was true of Patrick, Jewel's concerns and connections might lead us to expect her to follow the fortunes of this prominent campaign. We may presume that the mass of information to which she exposes herself made this difficult. Interestingly James spoke of the 'gossip' when Ecover was said to have been taken over by Unilever [jam-ssi: 83-85]. A

letter in *Ethical Consumer*<sup>20</sup> referred disapprovingly to GROUP4's fifty percent holding in the company. I checked with the magazine and to their knowledge Unilever have never had a stake in Ecover; the gossip it seems was not entirely correct.

Two features of these connections may differentiate between co-researchers. The first is the variety of relevant connections, the second is the degree to which co-researchers are integrated in the process of discourse formation of their group. With respect to the second, some forms of communication seemed better described as 'didactic' and others as 'dialectic'. The former best describes the communications accepted by Janice and Louise, who received what I would describe as filtered, ordered and organised information through campaigns from their church. Although more widely connected, Lucy seems now to respond to ready formulated campaigns. This is not to say that these co-researchers followed these campaigns unquestioningly (they did not), nor that the campaigns do not prompt thinking on their own part (they do). The point is to comment on the form of communication, which is mostly in one direction, and the source, which is singular.

Conversely, the network described by Peter derives information from the Centre for Alternative Technology, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, other environmental groups and a local one opposed to genetic engineering. Further connections are apparent through his partner's connection with Free Tibet, his work with FoE and the Quakers, friends as a particular source of information and discussions on allotments. Additionally Peter's involvement in some of these groups seems to me to be at a level where he will have some small influence on their discourse.

Likewise the network James describes, which also filters and orders a discourse, is more organic. James is passed leaflets and newspaper cuttings by campaigners and friends and depending on his assessment of their worth and whether further friends would be interested he passes them on. Natasha's partner certainly contributes to a relevant discourse in his PhD on Local Exchange Trading Systems. Perhaps the 'wholefood Mafia'

to which she belonged whilst she worked in a shop performed for her a purpose somewhere between the dialectic and didactic. It is telling, again in this context, that Natasha says things will be far less black and white now she has left [nat-ssi: 59-60]. Perhaps the ultimate in dialectic involvement among my examples is Anthony. As a radical director performer he frequently, as frequently as his finances allow, engages the public in discourse on the ethical issues that also inform his consumption.

Anthony is not of course the only one of my co-researchers to voice their views to a wider audience. He keeps company with Natasha and Elaine in writing letters to producers. These three and Janice, sometimes to the embarrassment of their companions, also debate issues in shops. Some engage in leafleting. Additionally, in as much as some say they court like minded people there is also a proselytising role.

Some friends seem particularly knowledgeable. Bob for instance trusts his business associate's knowledge of alternative banks, Louise respects her Tradecraft representative, Anthony gains information from a friend who makes documentaries [bob-ssi: 92-93; lou-ssi: 20-22; ant-ssi: 27-28]. Some information that circulates seems somewhat esoteric such as that Cooperative brand margarine is vegan [nat-ssi: 177-178]. However, producers and retailers inform customers and although this was not a prominent source of information for ethical consumers it was mentioned by some [nat-ssi: 179].

If we consider sites for communication, churches are of course important. I suggest that Janice would not be able to be an ethical consumer without reference to her church. Robert however in his very different way would. He suggests that his conversations at church, like his work with the Open University, tend to confirm his prejudices rather than form them. But other sites are important. For instance, allotments for Misha, Natasha and Peter [nat-ssi: 208], wholefood shops and bike shops for Patrick [pat-ssi: 186-188], and more generally places of employment, all form sites for ethical discussion. Such discussions may or may not be deliberately courted but for some conscious attendance at

workshops and conferences is perhaps a significant part of a dialectic process [jew-ssi: 118-121; pet-ssi: 152-153].

As we might have predicted there are *Guardian/Observer/Independent* readers but also an earnest *Telegraph* reader. Lucy finds the *Big Issue* informative and Natasha also mentioned it. I easily found articles in the *Big Issue* relating to a variety of conventional ethical consumer issues<sup>21</sup>. As expanded in the next sub-section, only three co-researchers mentioned the dedicated magazine *Ethical Consumer*. Of these only Natasha regularly refers to it. Even she does not subscribe but surreptitiously reads it in one of the habitats I used to locate ethical consumers, Barry's Ecology Co. shop.

It seems that some of my co-researchers may be thought of as immersed in 'lifestyle laboratories'. For these, political discussions are integral to life. Others seem to accommodate their ethical consumption and consider following particular presented lines: buy fair traded tea at a supermarket, change your account to the Cooperative or Triodos Bank, buy Windward Island bananas.

A final caution is that co-researchers are not always receptive to new information. Whilst Jewel says she has always 'had an ear out' for ethical issues, Anthony speaks of situations where the response to uncomfortable information is 'I wish you hadn't told me that.' [ant-ssi: 123]. Bob 'felt he had no time for new information, what he had was sufficient to deal with.' [bob-ssi: 94]

#### **6.2.4. how would co-researchers search?**

Co-researchers were invited in the semi-structured interviews to say how they would approach an hypothetical (ethical) purchase<sup>22</sup>. Of course some co-researchers said that they only responded to highlighted issues rather than sought out information [see for instance ela-ssi: 103; fel-ssi: 216-217]. Ethical consuming happened as Robert put it 'by chance rather than design' [rob-ssi: 191]. Despite the difficulties also discussed in chapter four, I think some worthwhile theoretical understandings may be drawn from the data.

It is perhaps a telling division that some co-researchers said they would ask manufacturers or retailers [luc-ssi: 115-116; ela-ssi: 104-107] whilst others being somewhat more sceptical thought this a pointless exercise [jew-ssi: 135-136; rob-ssi: 188-189]. Alan argued that major manufacturers are now well aware of ethical issues and are able to respond [ala-ssi: 207-209]. Other sources of information included contacting campaign organisations, networks of friends, and even the internet.

Only two co-researchers said they would refer to *Ethical Consumer* [mis-ssi 182-183; nat-ssi: 197-200]. Robert shrewdly supposed the existence of such a magazine but, like Misha, would not normally have need of it. Only Natasha is a regular reader who valued the publication and felt it influenced her.

Two replies are worth particular mention. Janice's search for an ethical holiday would be through her church [jan-ssi: 88-92] suggesting a quite restricted although perhaps comprehensive information source. Belinda's reply was distinctly behaviourist. For the most part belief follows behaviour she argued [bel-ssi: 142-150]. Except in quite remarkable circumstances she would not be motivated to change her life and it was therefore difficult to formulate a satisfactory hypothetical situation for Belinda to consider - without manipulating her environment!

#### **6.2.5. income, price, availability and the 'ethical consumer'**

Sometimes the ethical consumer simply fails to find what they want. Peter who tries to avoid products made in China (considered a repressive regime) failed to find a silk shirt made elsewhere. We may presume that one would have been available but that Peter had a cost and attention time limit. My research is not specifically designed to address the matter of product availability and the relationship between income and the price of ethical goods. However, some observations may be made from the study. First, there is no direct relationship between income and the importance of price. James, with an annual income he estimated at approximately £2,000, bought what I calculate to be nearly 70% organic produce. The price conscious James [jam-letter: 20] reported his diet as

'progressed into being more or less wholly organic' in his last communication [Appendix M]. Carol, Felicity's partner, buys some organic produce at what she knows is a 'higher than usual price' [fel-ssi: 27-28]. But both Carol and Felicity are professionals reporting an income of between £40,000 and £50,000 for their family of three. By contrast Belinda, with a similarly high reported income but for a family of four, would in a perfect world buy organic produce, but at present does not. It would be consistent with such findings to conclude that price plays some part when a decision has been made to buy or not but that commitment to a particular course of action is paramount.

Secondly, searches for products that are not generally available do occur and non-availability does not figure as a regular deterrent to ethical consumption in the narratives of my co-researchers. I would not want to read too much into this because the finding could arise from the research design, but I would note that the *convenience of availability* does seem to affect behaviour. When the local cooperative store she favoured began to stock fair traded coffee, Jewel for instance was motivated to switch entirely to this more expensive product [jew-ssi: 60-62]. Similarly the reopening of a general shop was significant in facilitating Robert's move to buy locally [rob-ssi: 56-57]. Misha's purchase of free-range meat was in part dependent on him remembering to use the producer's inconvenient ordering process. Here a rise in price was sufficient to tip the balance against the product [mis-att: 20-21; mis-ssi: 43-56].

### **6.3. chapter summary and conclusion**

I have presented a wealth of ideas from the decision making data but let me leave the chapter with a few key themes. The common heuristics, albeit not applied in any strictly coherent pattern, and the clear importance of imitation (to many but not all co-researchers) strongly suggests a concept of social discourses is more appropriate to understanding ethical consumption than one of individual preferences. The heuristics suggest a primary division between those looking for 'alternative' paths to ethical consuming and revisionists seeking to modify mainstream capitalist enterprises.



Conversely, though I shall argue this is not incompatible with the previous finding, my examples of ethical consumers found remarkably individual ways ('projects') of living in their society and practising ethical consumption. Some seem responsive to particular discourses, some opt out and others adopt a particular strategy of active involvement. In each case there may be a natural limit to their engagement. This diversity is the theme to be developed in the next chapter.

Trust appears an important factor in enabling many consumers to make ethical decisions in what otherwise might seem impossible circumstances. Ethical consumers can be shown to be active satisficers on occasions but might more usefully be characterised as generally receptive and reactive - though sometimes only in quite specific issue areas. Although I have highlighted certain procedures as predominant in ethical consuming, singling out one, say intuition, is inappropriate. Additionally, attitudes cannot be 'read off' behaviour or vice versa, not least because of social mediation. There is ample evidence of co-researchers being influenced, either towards or against conventional ethical consumption, by their fellows.

The data suggests that the role of the ethical entrepreneur or company (the Body Shop, Cooperative Bank etc.) should be thought of as a tenuous one. Whilst I am not denying the success of such enterprises, individual ethical consumers bring markedly differing analysis to the same situations. In this respect information about seemingly ethical products has an uncertain role possibly putting off some would be consumers. Information is not always welcome, nor indeed necessary to some ethical consumers' projects, and may be derived from relatively wide or restricted networks.

#### notes and references:

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<sup>1</sup> Lorica is a durable synthetic material.

<sup>2</sup> Note this was before the public outcry about genetically modified foods.

<sup>3</sup> The Nud•ist search calculates that 'Nestlé' is mentioned in 4.9% of the text units in Bob's narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Friedman (1996).

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- <sup>5</sup> Janice might have changed her bank account to the Cooperative bank had context rationality not intervened. Her husband handles their financial matters [jan-ssi: 169-171].
- <sup>6</sup> Peter had found out about, and subsequently joined, the Environmental Transport Association from this magazine [pet-ssi: 9-16].
- <sup>7</sup> Elaine found out about the Brighton shop Vegetarian Shoes, where she bought a belt, and the Ethical Investors Group, where she invests, from this magazine [ela-ssi: 77-78; 39-41]. Elaine also mentioned the Vegetarian magazine [ela-ssi: 69-70].
- <sup>8</sup> 'Significant others' as used by the social philosopher George Herbert Mead in the early part of the twentieth century.
- <sup>9</sup> The theoretical sampling method makes it more or less inevitable that religious and spiritual meetings will be cited by some co-researchers as significant here but I draw no specific conclusion with regard to this.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Significance' is used in the general rather than statistical sense throughout the thesis.
- <sup>11</sup> The term supposed wrong doings here is used to cover a wide range of discourses. It is not intended to deny the misdemeanours upheld against McDonalds in the McLibel case.
- <sup>12</sup> After Eights are, according to Natasha, a sweet suitable for vegans but now produced by Nestlé.
- <sup>13</sup> The interview was carried out before the revelations in *The Guardian* about Ingvar Kamrad's (the founder of IKEA) fight against alcoholism and previous attraction to Fascism. Hopkins (1998).
- <sup>14</sup> Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986), p30.
- <sup>15</sup> See letter I received from *Which?* magazine dated 28 August 1997.
- <sup>16</sup> See ECRA (1998/9), p4 &20.
- <sup>17</sup> I am aware that the fragmentation and diversification of 'family' structures may make such a formulation increasingly problematical. However, here I intend a particular use as explained in the text.
- <sup>18</sup> I use the term 'partner' in preference to 'wife' or 'husband' because my examples include a gay couple. Later I use the term 'business partner' to distinguish a working relationship from an emotional or familial relationship.
- <sup>19</sup> This table is compiled from the co-researchers' receipts. Single items over £100, and any regular expenditure on utilities are not included. Duplicate items on a single receipt are counted as one potential decision opportunity. I have proportionately increased both expenditure and decision opportunities in relation to the co-researcher's estimate of the percentage of receipts collected. Averages of those receiving above average, average and below average income are presented.
- <sup>20</sup> See ECRA (1998/9), p4.
- <sup>21</sup> McClellan (1997); Khan (1998); Zobel (1999); in the *Big Issue*.
- <sup>22</sup> See chapters three and, for details of questions, four.

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## 7. individual 'projects' and the motivation of ethical consumers

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Yin's caution<sup>1</sup> against 'pooling data' across cases is ringing in my ears as I begin writing.

In the previous chapter my analysis of decisions, the embedded cases, ranged across my examples of ethical consumers, the cases studies, perhaps too indiscriminately. In this chapter I must strive much more towards clearly differentiating between co-researchers.

I again present findings directly from the data, but this time in order to understand motivation rather than decision procedures. Of course, understanding motivation is a necessary part of viewing consumers as rational. My first interest is directly with the philosophy my co-researchers bring to ethical consumption. I then raid a somewhat disparate group of Nud•ist nodes for insights into motivation and conclude by developing *individual profiles* about the 'project' of *being* an ethical consumer. Yin would, I think, approve.

### 7.1. the philosophies of 'ethical consuming'

In response to my question 'what is important about your ethical consuming' many co-researchers combined a consequentialist argument with a sense of duty or reference to virtue [ala-ssi: 233-237; ant-ssi: 147-156; bob-ssi: 114-117; jan-ssi: 107-110; mis-ssi: 208-211; nat-ssi: 227-228; pet-ssi: 220-230]. Typically, Anthony gives two reasons as 'firstly .... consumer power can be effective .... [and] secondly .... feeling comfortable with himself'. Similar philosophical combinations were apparent from most co-researchers [node 5] so that specific allocation of cases between, say, deontological and utilitarian approaches to ethical consumerism seems inappropriate. However, as I will show, these philosophical themes are present in co-researchers' narratives to differing degrees in different cases. Key philosophical perspectives therefore are appropriate to structure the following analysis.

### 7.1.1. consequentialism

I have argued above against a view of consumers as sovereign but noted that it is a powerful and central tenet of consumer activism that collective action should be mobilised to bring about change. It is therefore relevant to ask to what extent such a grandiose purpose motivates my examples of ethical consumers. It was certainly possible to discern some form of consequentialist argument in the *original* narrative<sup>2</sup> of most of my co-researchers [ala-email: 23 & 28; ant-att: 57; bel-att: 3-4; bob-att: 26 & 27; ela-att: 64-65; fel-att: 7; jan-att: 26-27; jew-att: 12-14; lou-att: 9-10; luc-att: 15; mis-att: 3; nat-att: 23-24; pet-att: 4-5; rob-att: 50-52]. A globalist perspective to 'make the world a better place' [pet-ssi: 221] predominated but I should mention two more locally focused versions. Belinda, and more fervently Patrick, were concerned primarily with preserving the local and traditional [bel-att: 3-4; pat-ssi: 72-75].

In response to more direct questioning differing views on the effectiveness and scope of ethical consumption became apparent. Far more co-researchers were tentatively optimistic about the prospects for positive change than otherwise [node 5 2 1]. I use the word 'tentatively' because they were clearly aware of the frailty of mass actions by individualised consumers [ala-ssi: 234-235; ela-ssi: 149-150; jan-ssi: 107-108; jew-ssi: 167-168; mis-ssi: 209-220; pet-ssi: 221-222; rob-att: 50-52]. To the extent that there was agreement among these optimists, progress in such a collective process is perhaps best characterised as a hope that others were undertaking similar action.

By contrast, when I asked Bob and Alan what is the importance of the ethical purchases they make, they said, respectively, 'practically none' and, 'very little' [bob-ssi: 112; ala-ssi: 233]. Nevertheless both these pessimists articulated ideas about collective action and they continue to engage in ethical purchases.

By taking statements about the supposed effectiveness of ethical consumer behaviour, I have suggested differences in attitude in Table 7.1. These relative positions are not definitive, though supporting data is collected in node 5 2 1. We may infer that

consequentialism is insufficient to explain all ethical consumption. What is also interesting is whether differing philosophical reasoning correlates with co-researchers' behaviour as ethical consumers and I shall return to this in the next chapter.

*Table 7.1 co-researchers philosophy*

<i>statements of philosophy</i>	<i>cases</i>
non-consequentialist	James
pessimistic / tentative consequentialist	Alan, Bob & Patrick
tentative consequentialist	Jewel, Misha, Natasha & Robert
optimistic / tentative consequentialist	Belinda, Elaine, Louise & Peter
strong consequentialist	Anthony, Felicity & Janice

Expectation from Bob and Alan of market response in respect of organic produce, a matter of increasing importance to consumers at the time of the study, seems curiously more positive. In contrast to Bob's low expectations of consumer effects I paraphrase one of his statements about organic food: 'The concern with organic food, said Bob, was about the health of the family but .... He saw organic farming as important in promoting an environmental awareness [and in the] long term the British suppliers would provide organic food.' [bob-ssi: 70-75]. Similarly Alan thought his regular standing order for organic produce although small proportional to his consumption of vegetables was the best way to encourage production [ala-ssi: 153-155].

However, I want to contrast the more purely consequentialist view held by the campaigning director and performer Anthony, with that of Bob who is involved in alternative business. Anthony optimistically argues that 'consumer power can be effective. Whether or not the response by companies to the growing number of vegetarians is cynical [what is important is] this has had an effect on factory farming' [ant-ssi: 148-150]. By contrast, Bob argued that the intention of suppliers matters [bob-ssi: 29-31]. So with regard to banking he shows himself as suspicious: 'With large companies there must be some doubts because of the marketing factor. In the case of the Co-op Bank

ethics is, he said, a marketing policy; the truth is important.' Whereas Anthony was concerned here with the outcome however it is achieved, Bob's focus was on just processes.

An occasional theme in consequentialism was that collective action should be undertaken when it is likely to be effective (as opposed presumably to symbolic) [ant-ssi: 48-50; bob-ssi: 114-116; luc-ssi: 66-68; mis-ssi: 144-146]. However views on what would be effective differed. Misha, for instance, was 'not convinced the [Nestlé] action was significantly affecting the company' whereas Bob who also looked for occasions where actions do seem to have a 'significant effect' mostly applies the boycott [mis-ssi: 144-146; bob-ssi: 114-116].

But the effects sought may not always be as grandiose as changing major company policy. Natasha, Peter, Louise and less obviously, Alan articulated Glover's<sup>3</sup> notion of 'significant difference'; in situations which seem overwhelming, an action is worth taking if there is reasonable expectation of beneficial effects which under more localised circumstances would be thought to be of value [nat-ssi: 227-229; pet-att: 94-96 & ssi: 170-173; lou-ssi: 10-11; ala-att: 27-28]. Significantly Louise said she had seen at first hand the good effects of support organisations like Traidcraft in Africa. One small scheme in a big problem is worthwhile, she added, for the people it helps. I will let Natasha's concerns in this respect carry us through from consequentialism to the notion of duty: 'Natasha said that it is important to her to be doing something and she felt, however small the impact, someone would benefit from her positive choices. She said she couldn't bear to do nothing about the problems she perceived.' [nat-ssi: 227-228].

### **7.1.2. the notion of duty**

Earlier in the interview with Natasha, she argued that 'where she was able to exercise choice it was incumbent upon her .... to act responsibly. Whether her actions mattered in the grand scheme of things, she thought it difficult to say.' [nat-ssi: 147-149]. The notion of duty lies in the imperative to action where choices are available and in this respect

ethical consumerism in affluent societies is, I have argued elsewhere<sup>4</sup>, inevitable. It follows from this argument that there is a duty to consider our consumption.

A number of my co-researchers saw, or implied, an obligation to restrain consumption [ela-att: 51-52; fel-ssi: 197-201 more so of course pat-ii: 19-21 & jam-ssi: 175-176]. I considered Louise to epitomise this wish not to 'be too materialistic' [lou-ssi: 60], whilst not self-consciously downshifting. Her practice of predominantly second-hand purchases is strongly echoed in Robert's cautions against commodity fetishes [lou-ssi: 60-64; rob-ssi: 85]. This might be expressed in various ways: as a duty to future generations [fel-ssi: 193-196; jew-ssi: 164]; in Patrick's case, to respect the efforts and achievements of past generations [pat-ssi: 2-7]; or the imperative against 'raising other Gods' [rob-ssi: 85].

Parallel to these duties were clear examples of philosophical generalisation. Here the scope of the generalisation differentiates co-researchers' projects. For example, Belinda's is perhaps the most focused on the welfare of poor people [bel-ssi: 117]. Although she was concerned to express her distaste for apartheid and we may infer is concerned worldwide, she sets her action boundary high and does not herself respond to, say, fair trade issues. Jewel expressed the opinion, in line with her intended commitment to fair trade, that we should not exploit other people [jew-att: 3; ssi: 164], and this obligation is echoed more generally [pat-ssi: 117; fel-att: 20-26; jan-att: 26]. The feeling of obligation to others is of course common at a mundane level. Natasha's story of buying chewing gum, in spite of ethical misgivings, because she felt obliged to a helpful shopkeeper for directions, is, I would suggest, typical of such situations [nat-att: 53-60]. Alan explicitly extends concern to other animals but confided that he is still not sure whether other animals have rights or we a duty to them [ala-ssi: 86-87]. Belinda's robust defence of chicken farming indicates she is less concerned about the treatment of other animals but not unconcerned [questionnaire]. James not unsurprisingly claimed a wide duty to all living things [jam-ssi: 206]. Like Lucy, Jewel elsewhere speaks of a duty to 'respect and conserve the earth' [luc-ssi: 119-120; jew-ssi: 164].

But duties collide. Bob provides certainly the most graphic example of this and the case against unswerving deontology. Bob believes he has a duty to boycott Nestlé products but promised to buy his son a particular confection that, unknown to Bob, carries the Nestlé logo. Bob concludes that '.... family life is far too important .... erm .... and I don't believe in being dogmatic about everything.' [bob-att: 188]. Similarly but in a wider sense Patrick thought that duties to protect tradition might override those to the present generation even where relief of relative poverty was concerned [pet-ssi: 71-79]. There were, of course, many cases of ethical dilemmas, but what is striking is the capacity to resolve issues. Remarkable confidence is expressed here by Robert and Lucy, both founded on their strong belief, respectively Methodism and Paganism, in knowing right from wrong [rob-ssi: 210-211; luc-ssi: 118-120].

### **7.1.3. the virtuous ethical consumer**

Some philosophical concepts that arose from the study seemed best expressed as virtues. I am not thinking of the virtuous ethical consumer in the classical heroic sense, although my penultimate chapter takes this theme. Here I am suggesting some co-researchers express concern with more mundane but theoretical virtues. Specifically ethical consuming helps Anthony, and others, 'feel comfortable' with themselves [ant-ssi: 155; fel-att: 7-9; jam-ssi: 171; jan-ssi: 109-110; mis-ssi: 208-209; nat-att: 23-24]. Conversely Belinda, in spite of doubts about factory farming, does buy intensively reared animal products. She retains nagging doubts [bel-att: 18-19]; she is not entirely comfortable. James alone constructed himself as disinterested in consequences. With classic resignation he says that 'he did not expect to change the world but to live justly in it. He could not change the world but he could .... change himself.' [jam-ssi: 148-149]. For James to live justly and to 'learn to practice compassion' were central to his living, and celibacy was also important so that he would not be distracted from his purpose [jam-ssi: 207 & 205].



James' pursuit of virtue leads to a carefulness as ethical consumer which can best be illustrated by a passage from the interview [jam-ssi: 77-80].

*What was important here was that the person he gave his money to should be a beneficiary. James said he respected the shop owner for being in business and providing the food. James had, he reasoned, a responsibility for the way he used his money. Money, he believed, was dangerous. He wanted to use it as a simple tool and not use it to wield power (and influence).*

James here is espousing something very different to the usual primarily consequentialist ethical consumer. He is engaging positively but only with those parts of society where he considers he can interact virtuously.

Disassociating oneself or exiting from parts of consumer society is also explicit in Patrick's narrative. Referring to his vegetarian diet, which he acknowledges is a compromise position, he says he has cut himself off from factory farming [pat-ssi: 49].

Anthony acts similarly [ant-att: 24-26]:

*I'd decided not to wear leather because I don't need to and that's the basis of my vegetarianism, I suppose. Erm... as long as I don't need anything I don't need to participate in like the killing of animals I'll ...er... try and keep up.*

I would argue that we may infer similar exits when we consider other co-researchers' vegetarian [ela-att 17-18] and vegan diets, pedestrianism and other *comprehensive* practices like patronising small and independent shops or markets.

The virtuous ethical consumer should perhaps act in a disciplined way [mis-att: 24] but that leads on to an examination of some little extravagances and perhaps feelings of guilt. But can and should virtue be its own reward?

#### **7.1.4. virtue as its own reward or a guilt trip?**

For some the virtue of ethical consuming is synonymous with a happier life for the virtuous individual. Peter, for instance 'believed the things he did directly improved the

quality of his life.’ [pet-ssi: 220-221]. In a similar vein Misha emphasised ‘he would not buy things just because they were the ethical substitute; the product had also to be good quality’ and in this Elaine and Louise concur [mis-ssi: 211-212; ela-ssi: 55-56; lou-ssi: 39]. However, peace of mind and quality of life may be expected to come at a pecuniary cost [lou: ssi: 12]. Indeed Patrick voices the formula: it costs more so I’m being virtuous [pat-ssi: 55-56] with regard to buying household cleaners.

On the other hand, trying to be an ethical consumer is seen as possibly leading to feelings of failure. Significantly some cautioned against ‘guilt trips’, becoming ‘neurotic’ or ‘too serious’ [luc-ssi: 37-38; pat-ssi: 41-42; nat-ssi: 65].

## ***7.2. further understanding motivation***

To deal with further the complex issue of motivation I move on to questions of change and stoppage as discussed in chapter three. Since I have rejected behaviourism, explanations here are couched in terms of interaction between attitudes, behaviour and environment.

### **7.2.1. changes dramatic and gradual**

This study was not devised specifically to reveal changing patterns of consumption. Inevitably, however, change can be inferred from narratives and my questioning about ‘first decisions’ to buy ethical products elicited vignettes of change. I can draw some limited conclusions from Alan’s description of his slide into fair trade and more abrupt changes towards ethical consumption by Robert, Elaine and Lucy and away from it by Natasha.

I had discussed the probability with other researchers<sup>5</sup> that one thing leads to another; that consumers considering, say, animal rights could be drawn into fair trading or vice versa. It is easy to illustrate that such a process has occurred among some of my examples. Alan [ala-email: 26-28], a vegan for some time, says:

*I very much like drinking coffee and used to be particular about buying speciality beans roasted by a local tea and coffee merchant. Then I got more into the 'ethical consumer' thing and thought that I should buy Traidcraft/Cafédirect or the like to at least give a higher price to growers.*

This process is not inevitable as illustrated by Elaine's example. Her vegetarian consumption followed exposure to a variety of ethical consumer discourses through animal rights magazines which also gave her some knowledge of fair trade, but she has not acted on the latter issue [ela-att: 48-49].

More difficult to pin point but nevertheless important is the possibility of priorities changing over time and leading to different ethical buying habits. Both Lucy and Elaine say they were previously more involved in environmental campaigns. Elaine now concerns herself more with animal rights and Lucy with the problems of the homeless [ela-ssi: 114-115; luc-ssi: 126-129]. Although they are still concerned about environmental issues, the lower *relative* importance they accord to these may have an effect on their response or otherwise to *evolving* issues. If attention is limited then that given to the consideration of environmental issues may be eclipsed by the current higher priority concern.

Patrick provides a more concrete example of this process [pat-ssi: 99-100 & 53-56]. Whilst living in squats Patrick had become vegan and he formed radical ideas on ethical consuming at that time [pat-ssi: 37-38]. He still uses *Ecover* household cleaner and eats soya products. However unlike James he is uncritical of both products. He himself says he is 'out of touch' because it is no longer necessary, or possible, to pursue fine points.

Change is not always gradual. Three narratives are of particular interest because they describe apparently abrupt changes in behaviour, significant in that they affected a cluster of products and of interest because they were triggered by seemingly unrelated events. One is remembered by Lucy [luc-ssi: 60-64]:

*Probably the beginning of ethical consuming was, she recalled, following a holiday in 1981. Among other things Lucy's cosmetics were stolen and she resolved to buy in future products from the Body Shop. Things had 'snowballed' from there and now included those things she and I had already reviewed and others like household cleaners which might be Down to Earth, BioD or whatever, depending on the retailer she used.*

I was interested in a narrative in Robert's audio-tape 'but certainly my ...er... shopping behaviour has changed over the last year.' [rob-att: 27 & ssi: 56-62] and invited him, in the semi-structured interview, to expand on the change:

*Robert attributed his recent change in shopping habit to perhaps two triggering events. The first was the reopening of a local shop which could supply many of their needs (basically bread and, for a while, vegetables) and the second was taking up playing tennis on a Saturday morning. The tennis, he said, forced a change in shopping habit; his attitudes towards local shopping were formed; the reopening of the local shop made his preferred change possible. Robert recalled an argument about the relevant efficiency of local versus supermarket shopping. But this he thought post dated the change in shopping pattern and only served to reinforce his ideas. However triggered Robert asserted, the change was a very, very conscious shift.*

In these two cases we may infer that the propensity to act had been established previously. The third relates to a change in occupation that takes Natasha reluctantly away from ethical consumption [nat-ssi: 4-7]. It is probable that a propensity to return to buying products like BioD will remain to be consummated when Natasha considers herself better off *and* other factors allow.

*Whilst she had been employed in the wholefood shop she had bought BioD 'vegan' cleaning products. Now that she was temporarily unemployed, she said she was unable to afford this and bought the cheapest cleaner Netto could provide. The price comparison was, she recalled, something in the order of four times.*

By contrast, Elaine's conversion to vegetarianism, just as sudden, was undoubtedly triggered by a relevant event:

*Elaine recalled that it was some twenty years ago that she had started buying cruelty free cosmetics. A few years later she had tried some vegetarian meals but not found them very appetising. She had not eaten much meat during this period and for much of the time not eaten chickens because of their treatment. She became vegetarian about six years ago in a sudden response to an article in Animal Aid magazine Outrage, about the treatment of calves. Elaine emphasised the finality of this decision in that she imposed her decision on her willing family and arranged for the meat they had in stock to be taken away by relatives.*

However, as Natasha's current situation shows, changes are not necessarily irreversible. I have already described Felicity as impulsive [fel-ssi: 70-73]. She would no doubt approve. What follows, as an extreme example, is a description of many changes in her diet, but others have changed [ela-ssi: 26-28; jam-ssi: 61] and some reverted or changed again [ala-ssi: 80; ant-att: 5; mis-att: 16; nat-ssi: 146-147; pat-ssi: 35].

*When Nigel was born in 1982 she moved into a house where there were two vegans living. Their diet had at first seemed incomprehensible to Felicity but as she began to question their ideas she found a compelling argument behind the non-meat diet. What interested her was the understanding that, because of the inefficiency of feeding grain to cattle, the world population could be well fed on a vegan diet but far less so on a meat diet.*

*This argument she said 'rang true' and she became a vegan. However, she found the diet too strict and by the mid-eighties had reverted to vegetarianism. Felicity thought that in the time following she would have had phases of veganism, vegetarianism and a low meat diet.*

I suggest we may understand Felicity as uncomfortable with commercial meat production. However, she varies her behaviour in response to her evolving understanding and the environment in which she finds herself. These cases seem to me to be consistent with the view that there may be latent tendencies towards ethical consumption. And responses to the interplay between attitude and environmental stimuli may be instant or evolving.

### **7.2.2. stoppage: the importance of taste, time, cost and convenience**

Here I develop the discussion in chapter six of taste, time, cost and convenience with examples of the restrictions they pose to ethical consumption. In relation to the co-researcher's narrative I categorised *taste*, *cost* and *convenience* as 'other concerns' and *time* as a restriction on attention (chapter four). I am concerned here particularly where one or more of these constraints has been given as an overriding consideration in some purchase.

My category of *taste* concerns the co-researcher's subjective assessment of the good or appropriate quality of a product and matters of fashion certainly figure here. Two brief examples are useful. Sociologically we can understand co-researchers as having a self-image. Anthony has a concern when buying a belt that he will not 'look crap' [ant-ssi: 114-117]. Similarly Elaine wants the house plants that adorn her home to look healthy [ela-att: 30]. I note that all my co-researchers, with the possible exception of James, mentioned a quality preference in some way during the research [node 4 2].

To take this a stage further, I want to turn to the puzzles of the *taste* of coffee and the effectiveness of household cleaners: the *taste* for cleanliness. As I became more familiar

with co-researchers and their views, anomalies with these two products arose which I shall address in turn. I would guess there were more but these were particularly evident.

People feel strongly about coffee; to be a connoisseur currently, I would suggest, carries social kudos<sup>6</sup>. Alan, Bob, Elaine, Janice, and Peter all indicated that they have reason to drink good quality 'real' coffee [ala-email: 26-27; bob-att: 143-144; ela-att: 40; jan-ssi: 101; pet-ssi: 32]. I am in no position to judge. I very occasionally find myself commenting on a 'nice drink' but the reader must bear with my naiveté on the subject.

Not all of my co-researchers drink coffee; some prefer simpler drinks [jam: informal meeting 30 Jan98]. Most of those who are coffee-drinkers feel they have a duty to buy or at least consider fair traded products. In such a situation people might be expected to evaluate fair traded against commercial brands. It seems from the following narrative that Misha [mis-ssi: 80-92] positively valued Cafédirect as a high quality coffee:

*The change from commercial coffee, Misha explained, to the coffee they now drank occurred in a number of stages. The initial decision was to change from instant to percolated coffee. Misha tried a few brands but found them too bitter. Being a student he said he had shopped at Oxfam for inexpensive clothes and so had seen the other products displayed in the shop. He was therefore aware of Cafédirect coffee and decided to try it. He found it to his taste. He stressed more than once that he would not use the fair traded coffee if this had not been so; he would not buy solely because a product was ethical.*

*The story moved a stage further when a friend asked if they wanted to join her/him on a trip to Suma wholefoods in Halifax to buy produce in bulk. This proved relatively successful but it was a long trip for them to keep making and they tended to have the products for a very long time because of their 5Kg bulk. Misha satirised this as judging the edibility of a product they had stored on the basis of whether there was movement in the pack.*

*They found that Lembas, which Misha said was a co-operative, was the local Suma distributor. They obtained a catalogue and had subsequently used Lembas for fair traded coffee whilst they had been in the city.*

Robert agrees saying 'the [fair traded] instant coffee and ...erm... their range of coffee beans I find very satisfying.' [rob-att: 43-45]. Peter drinks percolated fair-traded coffee and makes no mention of a quality problem [pet-ssi: 32-36]. Conversely Janice [jan-ssi: 101-102] whilst accepting the duty to buy Cafédirect seems in a similar passage to treat it as a sacrifice:

*Janice said she buys a luxury coffee for occasions. When she has visitors she may use fair traded, make a point of asking them if they liked it and saying it is fairly traded.*

More directly, Elaine does not like fair traded coffee *per se* and Alan is quite clear that it is not as good quality as locally produced coffees [ela-att: 48-49; ala-ssi: 22-23]. Cafédirect have of course attempted to construct their tea brands as of higher quality because, they argue, farmers gain from fair trade and reserve the finest quality for this outlet. A similar argument in respect of coffee appeared in *New Internationalist*<sup>7</sup>. As fair traded brands proliferate and specialise negative connotations may, of course, subside but taste is, I would argue, no simple concern. It is not a matter of quality but also of *perceptions* of quality.

A parallel divergence of opinion may be drawn with cleaning products although it is less clearly articulated. Elaine says in her narrative that eco-friendly household cleaners don't work [ela-att: 38-40] and Jewel agrees: 'I did, I did try to use some washing up stuff, I can't even remember the name of it ...erm... but it was useless and then you find you're spending more money not getting your dishes clean and that's the dilemma I think lots of people have with organic things.' [jew-att: 62-64].



By considerable contrast, James buys his usual biodegradable washing liquid from a health food store. He finds cleaning product choices easy within his cost restrictions: 'This month James said he had not been able to afford washing liquid and had bought a block of soap and would wash by hand.' [jam-ssi: 3-4]. Seemingly differences in the demands which we make on products, or alternatively in the expectations which are socially constructed for products, affect our possibilities of enjoying ethical alternatives.

*Time* constraints and *convenience* are important determinants of ethical consumption. Many co-researchers expressed a preference for shopping at small local shops. Few actually do so [Table 8.2 lifestyle indicators]. The reasons given for this are most often time constraints and convenience compounded by cost. A good example of this is when Anthony says given more money 'he would 'buy' both time to indulge his belief in shopping at small stores and finding out more about products and also the more expensive products and higher prices of smaller vegetarian shops.' [ant-ssi: 206-208]. Similar constraints are noted by Elaine, and Janice says that her supermarket convenience shopping originally prevented her from buying fair traded products [ela-ssi: 22-23; jan-ssi: 16]. There are also examples of *satisficing* where the co-researcher simply did not feel they had the time for further searching. I have addressed these in the previous chapter. In the same manner, all of my examples of ethical consumers mentioned *cost* or money considerations in some way [node: 4 2]. We may presume all these constraints are important in structuring consumption and therefore ethical consumption.

### **7.2.3. stoppage: consuming desires**

I have been in danger of presenting too virtuous a bunch of ethical consumers and must redress the balance. The difficulty here is to present important features of people's lives succinctly but in sufficient detail to enlarge the picture. Hobbies, passions and interests are shown in Table 7.2. Little extravagances are collected in Table 7.3. In some instances my co-researcher has specifically acknowledged that, say, a passion is in conflict with a notion of consumer restraint and/or ethical consumption. In others it is my presumption

given the data. I indicate these differences. These examples of interests which my co-researchers have should be taken as indicative rather than comprehensive. They are simply instances that arose in the study.

Since she was a person of seemingly considerable moderation it was difficult to accommodate Louise into Table 7.2 and some explanation is in order. She spent some time with a charity teaching in Africa, is presently donating to charities but did not indicate that she is active charitably [lou-ssi: 53; 57-58].

To the extent that one would consider these people's lives to be full, the activities shown in Table 7.2 represent competing concerns with matters of ethical consumption. In this respect, voluntary work is important, not only because it is almost certainly one of the ways co-researchers are exposed to and possibly contribute to ethical consumer discourse but also because voluntary activities require attention in their own right. In some cases, I suggest particularly for Robert, Jewel, Anthony, Bob and Janice, such activity seems to take up a very significant proportion of their busy lives. There is evidence presented above [see 7.2.1 'changes dramatic and gradual'] that to give attention to one concern results in the diminution of that given to another and this is a theme I will develop.

*Table 7.2 co-researchers life beyond ethical consumption*

<i>case study</i>	<i>pseudonym</i>	<i>special commitments</i>	<i>hobbies, passions, interests</i>	<i>voluntary work</i>
05	Alan		<b>motorcycling</b> [ala-att: 2]	
08	Anthony		theatre & <b>film</b> [ssi: 195-197; att: near end]	arts funding [ssi: 200-202]
07	Belinda	<b>family</b> [ssi: 126-127]	science <sup>8</sup>	Help the Aged [ssi: 154]
03	Bob	<b>family</b> [att: 188]	see voluntary work	London ICOM treasurer & director of NOW <sup>9</sup> [ssi: 124-125] RSPCA [ssi: 111-112]
11	Elaine	<b>family</b> [att: 20-23 & ssi: 39-42]	animal rights [ssi: post script]	
17	Felicity	son [att: 32]	women's disco [ssi: 200-201]	see hobbies
15	James		comics [ssi: 122-126] dance & acting [letter: 23]	temple building & Critical Mass [ssi: 168-169 & 150-157]
02	Janice	<b>family</b> [att: 7]	collecting chamber pots, home & garden [ssi: 139; 119; 161-162]	Tear Fund, Christian Aid, Heart Start and pastoral work [ssi: 113-117]
12	Jewel		home & garden, walks & music [ssi: 155; 4; att: 78-79]	RSPCA & church [ssi: 140-142; 146-150]
04	Louise	see text below		
10	Lucy	household [ssi: 54-56]	music, home, cooking & eating [ssi: 137; 135-134; 56]	Homelessness Action Resource Centre [ssi: 126-127]
09	Misha	<b>parents</b> [att: 8-9; ssi: 7-8]	leisure biking & <b>travel</b> [att: 90-91; ssi: 7-9; 234-236]	various occasional fund raising [ssi: 194-198]
13	Natasha	parent [att: 88]	cooking, socialising & walking [ssi: 212]	Citizens Advice Bureaux [ssi: 208-211]
16	Patrick		music and art [ssi: 122-123]	documenting the built environment [ssi: 202-204]
06	Peter		<b>sporting holidays</b> & furniture making [ssi: end of; att: 41-42]	Free Tibet & FoE [ssi: 82 & 206-209]
14	Robert			church & local community association [ssi: 202-204]

Note: commitments, hobbies, passions, and interests which have been identified by co-researchers as in conflict with the notion of ethical consuming are **emboldened**. Voluntary associations are included only where the co-researcher indicated they are active in some way, e.g. in street collections, committee work or campaigning rather than donating. A similar rubric is used in Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3 co-researchers little extravagances**

<i>case study</i>	<i>pseudonym</i>	<i>little extravagances</i>	Table 7.3 shows small extravagances
05	Alan	<b>coffee</b> [email: 26]	indulged in by some co-researchers and
11	Elaine	<b>coffee</b> (shoes) [att: 49 & 15-16]	in some cases given up because of
17	Felicity	( <b>vanilla milkshake</b> ) [att: 119-120]	ethical consumption. I make no
02	Janice	<b>coffee &amp; soft tissues</b> [ssi: 101; 100]	suggestion that these significantly
13	Natasha	rare consumer frivolities [att: 78-80]	impact on co-researchers lives, but they
16	Patrick	cigarettes biscuits & (vinyls) [ssi: 189-190; 123; 173-179]	help to explain behaviour by making
14	Robert	<b>chocolate</b> [att: 189-199]	co-researchers more understandable as
Note: Behaviour that because of ethical consuming is no longer a passion is in parenthesis.			individuals. For instance, Robert's

partiality for chocolate results in him not considering the ethics of these particular purchases. It is a small extravagance for a man who is primarily interested in broad issues and otherwise subscribes to a Puritan ethic.

As I made clear in the introduction, whilst I am satisfied that the depth of enquiry of this study allows the co-researchers adequately to explain their approach to life, it must be accepted that we still do not know all about them. What we do not know, are perhaps all concerns about health, relationships and other private pleasures and anxieties. For instance in one case a past relationship was said to be unresolved, but I agreed, because it was obviously still a sensitive concern, not to include details. But these matters will be important in framing people's attention to ethics in consumption. A glimpse of Peter's actions when he met and 'fancied' Kath, however, illustrates how radically people's lives can be affected [pet-ssi: 189]. What is clear is that there are strong personal and social pressures within which ethical consumption is mediated.

### ***7.3. maintaining the notion of an ethical consumer: tensions in teleology***

This closing section draws the foregoing together to form the basis for a theoretical framework. I start by looking at the metaphors my co-researchers employed. Then by

examining the subjective extent to which each co-researcher sees herself or himself as consuming ethically and how this fits into her or his lifestyle I shall develop individual characterisations. I refer to these as the co-researcher's *project* although in some cases this word implies a greater degree of deliberation on the part of the co-researcher than might be appropriate.

### 7.3.1. metaphors: 'recharging the ethical batteries' on the consumer 'front'

Metaphors may be revealing in understanding how co-researchers see ethical consumerism in their lives. Some seem to understand ethical consuming as if it were a battle for space, perhaps in the marketplace, perhaps within themselves. Robert particularly, Anthony, and perhaps surprisingly, James refer to particular aspects of ethical consuming, like fair trade or banking, as a 'front' [rob-att: 49-263; ant-att: 91; jam-att: 8]. Similarly Misha speaks of 'keeping up' his cycling to work as if against some countervailing force, and Natasha of 'drawing the line' of action [mis-att: 55; nat-att: 49].

**Figure 7.1 BATTERY EGGS  
IS COLLABORATION  
The Vegan Police?**



Robert was saddened to find he had used, what he decided was a military term, 'front', eight times in his narrative [rob-ssi: 48-52]. There is an intensity about such narrative; the business of realising more or less of a project.

Clearly concerned with the resolution of subjective conflicts, James reports, 'I no longer *rest easy* with the use of batteries' [jam-letter: 7, *my emphasis*], and so he argues something will have to be done.

Likewise for Janice the added bonus of ethical consuming is 'peace of mind' [jan-ssi: 109-110].

Sometimes a consumer may be concerned to 'recharge the strictness batteries' [ant-ssi: 177] and

rejoin what seems to be being portrayed as a struggle. Calculations of relative 'strictness' with others are made [mis-ssi: 69; rob-att: 193]. And if one's strictness begins to fail, beware the 'wholefood Mafia' and 'vegan police' [nat-ssi: 11 & 113]; certainly not an entirely fictitious force as the graffiti [Figure 7.1] in Natasha's town shows.

In spite of these metaphoric representations of struggle, as noted above an equally evident theme was of avoiding excess. Peter conjured up the 'hair shirt person' as an appropriate metaphor [pet-ssi: 241]. There was an apparent conundrum in that co-researchers did not want to become excessive as ethical consumers, but because most have relevant connections to ethical consumer discourses, they 'had an ear out' for further issues [jew-ssi: 48-49]. Thus they appeared both to limit *and* to extend their involvement.

Not all of course tackle conflicts and demands in the same way. Whilst Patrick says 'I cut myself off' from issues, Janice engages with the recommendation that 'you do not spread your jam too thinly'. In the same engaged manner, according to Felicity doing something is 'better than a poke in the eye', whilst Peter immerses himself in a 'lifestyle laboratory' of practice and debate [pat-ssi: 49; jan-ssi: 135; fel-ssi: 196-197; pet-ssi: 156]. I was amused that Natasha characterised this debate among ethical consumers as 'wittering on' [nat-ssi: 159]; this is a telling description and she, I think, used the finest metaphors.

Some major brands show signs of becoming generic terms to denote the unethical consumer. Although Lucy thought otherwise, her insistence that she had never been in 'McDonalds' seemed to chime with James' characterisation of his consumerist past-self as having a 'McDonalds diet' [luc-letter: 12-13; jam-ssi 53]. Similarly Patrick described his youth as part of 'Coca-Cola culture' [pat-ssi: 154-155].

### **7.3.2. co-researchers' individual 'projects'**

The following individual characterisations are my assessments of each co-researcher's approach and, unlike the synopses in chapter five, co-researchers have not seen what I have written. However, I believe they are consistent with the foregoing. A trail of evidence is given where it seems imperative to support *additional* assertions. Additionally

it should, of course, be recognised that co-researchers have not simply designed their lifestyles but have developed behaviour from their existing dynamic social and material circumstances. Alan, for instance, says he drifted into his profession and has since altered his approach to it to accord more closely with the beliefs that also inform his ethical consumption [ala-ssi: 229-31].

These projects are snapshots at a point in time and no direct attempt is made to understand how co-researchers' approaches might develop. However, there are apparent tensions within some co-researcher's projects and these are noted. Such tensions may, of course, portend changes. My assessments are arranged alphabetically at this stage to avoid a suggestion of grouping:

*Alan's approach is a carefully worked out balance between his enjoyment of life, which includes motorcycling, mountain biking, travel and music, and adaptations to accommodate his ethical beliefs. Alan acknowledges there are environmentally damaging elements to his leisure activities. This balance is mostly satisfied by 'set-piece' specific adaptations such as veganism and pedestrianism but also by reasoning out complex issues where he believes this is possible. Alan has for instance carefully configured his domestic heating installation to deliver moderated warmth, efficiently and with consideration of long service. He will sometimes devote considerable time to get a particular purchase item right but even he says it is possible to go too far. He sees the Vegan Society, for example, as too serious for him.*

*There appear to be few tensions except a little in terms of his consumption level. He illustrates this by reference to his lone occupation of a moderately sized house. [ala-ssi: 254-255; 251-252].*

*Anthony* lives a proactive, campaigning lifestyle. His work in radical theatre shapes his living both in financial and temporal terms. Ethical consumption is a significant part of this but complements the campaigns and does not dominate. For instance, *Anthony's* recent research on abattoirs for a critical documentary is coupled almost essentially with a primarily vegan diet. Yet this considerable self-imposed work commitment prevents him from shopping at his preferred small shops and compounds compromises of diet when he is away from home.

Any achievement of more free time and higher income would *Anthony* asserts alter this equation in favour of smaller shops and more environmentally sound products. If there is tension here, therefore, it is between ethics and ethics. [ant-att: 5]

For *Belinda* ethical consuming is only necessary at the extreme because in general she considers consumer capitalism has delivered the goods to the masses. It pleases *Belinda*, for instance, that the more efficient production of food has meant that ordinary people are, for the most part, better fed than ever before. Consumption, in a limited anthropomorphic sense, is therefore not inherently unethical. Action, however, should be taken when scientifically proven to be necessary, when insufficient knowledge has been gathered or in cases of extreme injustice.

There seem to me to be two tensions in *Belinda's* project. The first is an apparent inconsistency between her embrace of progressive industrial processes and her desire to retain traditional practices. The second derives from the increasing misgivings *Belinda* expresses about contemporary food production. By her own criteria *Belinda* might be expected to act as a consumer to avoid new products that she sees as having undergone insufficient scientific scrutiny. However, her husband's scepticism about organic produce, the possible alternative, seems to be significant in precluding this. [bel-ssi: 40-42]



Much of *Bob's* effort is directed at working and taking an active role within the social economy. This imposes time and money restrictions which at present constrain his ethical consumption. Within these constraints, he likes to think he limits action to those things that have a good chance of being effective, but is mostly pessimistic about the prospects for change. In accord with his support for the social economy, he is interested in what he sees as ethical processes more than outcomes.

Bob expresses many concerns about his consumption more in terms of what he buys than the amount. He may see himself as only partially successful as an ethical consumer. He would clearly prefer to be more at ease but pressure of work and complications with family commitments predominate.

*Elaine* is somewhat concerned about fair trading, more so about the environment but crucially she becomes passionately involved at what she sees as the mistreatment of animals. Whilst Elaine sees herself as having deliberately moderated her consumption, compromises on fair trading and her environmental concerns are routine. With animal welfare issues, potential conflicts are the cause of considerable concern. Elaine is an ethical consumer primarily, though by no means exclusively, to the extent she sees herself as disengaged from animal cruelty. Otherwise to make some effort when a problem is highlighted in the animal rights discourse, as she does, is to be 'doing her bit'.

Elaine is a little uneasy with her consumption, for instance in the necessary purchase of a second car by her partner and herself. She would also prefer that her job were in accord with her beliefs. But for the above reasons and because she has demonstrated to herself she can act in accord with her beliefs, her unease, I argue, should not be taken as constituting very significant tensions. [ela-att: 57-58; ela-ssi, 30; 45; 90-91; 114-115; 120-123; 126-129; 142].

*Felicity* does not approach ethical consumerism in an organised way. To do so would be to reduce the spontaneity of life. Although *Felicity* is whimsical, she will react in all aspects of her life with strong emotion and commitment particularly to what she perceives as injustice. So *Felicity*'s work as a solicitor and her leisure activities address social issues. Her ethical consumption is more likely to be directed towards specific targets than to form a comprehensive strategy. So, in spite of hedonistic reasons for the contrary, she adamantly boycotts McDonalds. She equally resolutely patronises the Body Shop. Life seems to have too great an interpersonal content to admit much materialism in *Felicity*'s life.

Contradictions are therefore rife but are a matter of amusement and not tension. [fel-ssi: 184-186]

*James* convincingly says he has deliberately restricted his income. His ethical consumer decisions have become manageable and his social contacts provide the required discourses to address those remaining. *James* wants to be sure he discharges his responsibility, including and especially spending money, in a socially enhancing way and to this extent is working towards doing the right thing. The more he can see a process with which he involves himself is good, the more satisfied he is. Small scale is therefore essential to his project. This is as true of his expenditure as of his paid and unpaid work and leisure.

Tensions seem few and of little substance. He may occasionally wonder what to do, for instance, when his father offers to buy him some shoes.

*Janice* lives in a world where consumer action can have effect. What is important, I think therefore, is for her to be active within the structure her church designates. The church selects and designates suitable activities. She achieves ethical consumerism in the areas where she has familial jurisdiction and to the extent that changes in consumption are not difficult to incorporate. As a result, commercial products sometimes co-exist with ethical ones. Within this church setting *Janice* is highly motivated and therefore derives a sense of achievement.

Where there is an underlying tension is that *Janice* reasons, as a development of the church discourse, that we all go along with cheap products without wondering how their cheapness is being achieved. At base she is therefore uncomfortable. [jan-ssi: 18; 128].

*Jewel* is a long standing (old) Labour supporter and attends to the traditional Labour concerns which invariably coincide with her religious beliefs. To the extent that she addresses these imperatives – cooperation, international fraternity, equality - she is content. Through her political and religious activities she picks up on and subscribes to the major ethical consumer discourses.

Tensions arise in two ways. Firstly when *Jewel* lapses into comfort and thinks she is doing things she isn't. She originally, for example, spoke as if she bought only fair trade coffee; she did not but because of the study she says she does now. Secondly, through her religious work she has an appreciation of the relatively high material comfort of her lifestyle. She therefore has a heightened sense of inequality. [jew-ssi: 156-159]

*Louise* is content to be thrifty. Much of what she owns is quite deliberately second-hand. Only a small proportion of her regular purchases are consciously ethical and she says these will be only in cases where she wants and likes the product. Ethical consumerism, she says, is good to the extent that it produces any small positive effect but she has only recently been introduced to the notion. To what extent she will consider it worthwhile to extend the project is uncertain.

Louise might wish to show more forethought when making purchases. However, to consume ethically may carry a lower imperative when consumption is in any case very moderate. In this sense no significant tensions seem to me to arise in Louise's lifestyle.

[lou-ssi: 29-31]

For *Lucy*, life is to be affirmed and enjoyed. She should, and does, react to calls to action both in terms of particular products and services and in being active in voluntary groups but does not, and should not, seek to be perfect. She has sufficient information sources to alert her to a range of campaigns, including major ethical consumer discourses. She will take part in these, but will rationalise if they impinge on her celebration of life. Mostly Lucy believes ethical consuming will coincide with improvements to her life in accord with good karma.

In so far as Lucy has misgivings about increased consumption they are minor. She would prefer her husband not to use a car for instance but will not seriously take issue since enjoying life is an overriding imperative. [luc-ssi: 138-140]

*Misha* has accepted he is not going to live absolutely in accord with his concerns for the environment. What he does do, including his ethical consumption, is significant and I therefore think of him as pragmatic. Hobbies, travel and other enjoyable pastimes sometimes fall outside ethical consumption but occasionally coincide with his ethical actions. His concerns for human justice are tempered by the difficulty of resolving some issues and circumscribed by his belief in scientifically underpinned progress (which includes scientific research performed on other animals) but again this does not prevent him taking positive action.

*Misha's* project's success resides in his willingness to respond to most, though not all, of those matters he sees as important. It is not about comprehensive lifestyle changes. Only in his relationship with his partner, whom he sees as more inclined to act on her ethical beliefs, are slight tensions apparent. [mis-ssi: 69]

*Natasha* sets herself high standards, for instance adding many concerns to those set out by me in the original questionnaire. With exceptional access to ethical consumer discourses, she seems to aim to meet these in all aspects of her life including her consumption. Partly this is achieved by set-piece approaches such as her vegan diet and non-use of a car, but also by exercising choice. Rarely, practicalities or frivolity intervene, but both are seen as necessary. Practicalities such as temporary lack of money dictate that she cannot buy, for instance, expensive (vegan) household cleaners, but any tension is alleviated by a presumption that she will return to better habits when income permits. So for *Natasha* her ethical consumption is achieved with few lapses.

Because *Natasha* does not see herself as materialistic her lifestyle project seems to her attainable. Tensions, in so far as they exist therefore, seem to be superficial. [nat-ssi: 225]

*Patrick* says he has deliberately restrained his income. His ethical consumerism is sometimes a residue from when such decisions were more significant to him. For the most part *Patrick* believes that he could not untangle the complexities of production to consume ethically. For this reason and because he wishes to conserve tradition, low consumption is for him the only rational response. Having said that, *Patrick* says he would use any increased income to shop more at wholefood stores. Ethical consumption is therefore a secondary consideration not requiring great deliberation.

If there is a tension it is between *Patrick* and the profligate society, destroying tradition, which he sees around him.

For *Peter*, ethical consumerism should enhance life. He chooses to do those things that also improve the quality of his life like buying organic produce. Because good actions should be self-enhancing *Peter* maintains his concept of himself as an ethical consumer. He sees his partner as a good influence in this respect. *Peter's* work as a management consultant accords with these views when he works for organisations such as *Friends of the Earth* and the *Quakers* but he also works with commercial companies and toys with the notion that bringing ethical ideas even to arms manufacturers would have positive value.

However, *Peter* speaks of tensions between some of his pleasures and his wish to live carefully. Such activities as rock climbing and skiing that involve environmentally damaging travel worry him but they are pleasures with which he will not easily part.

[pet-ssi: 168]

*Robert* tends towards Puritanism. Decisions can be made by Robert, I would suggest, more or less in isolation from conventional ethical consumer discourse by applying principles more probably to the big picture than to the detail of his consumption. Robert will be more concerned for instance to shop locally and frugally than to buy a specific, say fair traded or environmentally sound, product and especially not to spend inordinate time and/or money on such detail. Time and money are better deployed, he believes, elsewhere.

This project sets up underlying tensions not least with his family as he makes efforts to limit and simplify his consumption. That he does not make use of a car is an instance of such a situation. Being convinced of the correlation between poverty and wealth increasingly bothers Robert. [rob-ssi: 3-5; 108-113; 216-218]

#### **7.4. chapter summary**

There is a strong, but not universal, concern with consequences among my examples of ethical consumers with some sophisticated philosophical underpinning. Even James laments what he sees as the present irresponsibility of multinationals. To be consistent with his philosophy of virtuous living he regrets that an improvement is unobtainable. However such concern with change does not fully explain ethical consumerism especially considering the pessimism which is expressed by some. Two further key themes emerge. One is for a virtuous consumer to disassociate her/himself from unethical practices. The other is that choice means a duty to consider consumer action. In spite of the seeming complexity of their project, my examples of ethical consumers are in the main able to achieve their aims.

Co-researchers' concepts were not easily reducible to classical philosophies; James may be thought of as seeking to live virtuously, but although Janice expects (with others) to be collectively effective, she cannot be categorised simply as a utilitarian. She also wants the peace of mind that she is living acceptably as, in her case, a Christian. The others are even

harder to categorise. Nevertheless I tentatively suggest that the notions of concern for consequences, duty and virtue do *help* to structure differences between the co-researchers' 'projects' and to explain their behaviour. Unresolved tensions remain but for largely explicable reasons.

Changes in buying patterns towards ethical consuming can develop as people are exposed to new discourses. Conversely drift away from some practices occurs. Quite abrupt changes in behaviour were noted in some of the examples of ethical consumers in this study. These affected constellations of products. Although these may be triggered by related events, it may equally be an unrelated event that triggers latent attitudes.

Such ethical consumer behaviour and changing behaviour is mediated within a range of personal and situational contexts in ways which are unique to each individual. However, common themes, for instance around the range and intensity of familial relationships (see also 6.2.1), are apparent. In some cases concurrence or conflict with other interests and commitments to voluntary work are important.

The metaphors employed by co-researchers suggest that some see themselves as engaged in a struggle. I refer to this as a project. These projects are unique and I have suggested above are pursued in unique circumstances. By knowing ethical consumers in sufficiently full depth *and breadth* it would seem possible to express their 'projects' in rational terms and to render their remaining tensions understandable.

notes and references:

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<sup>1</sup> Yin (1994), p51.

<sup>2</sup> An original narrative was not used only in the cases of James and Patrick - see also Ch.4.

<sup>3</sup> Glover (1986).

<sup>4</sup> Newholm (1999b).

<sup>5</sup> I discussed this view with Deirdre Shaw at *Glasgow Caledonian University* and Tracey Bedford at *University College London*. Both are researching ethical consumers but have not published conclusions to date.

<sup>6</sup> See the comparison of tastes of fair traded and commercial coffees in van der Zee (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Ranson (1995).



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<sup>8</sup> I include science here because Belinda says she keeps on top of the academic papers in her area, her husband lectures in the same area and the room in which the interview took place was an academics room.

<sup>9</sup> Network of Wholefood Wholesalers.

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## **8. summing up the case studies**

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This chapter seeks to conclude the analysis of the co-researchers, considered as case studies. Drawing on the forgoing data I examine the theoretical propositions outlined in chapter three. The insights gained will be used to address the questions posed in the introductory chapter. Having already set out the evidence in some detail, I now reduce the trail of evidence to an occasional necessary reference, either on the rare occasion when new material is introduced or where I judge particular emphasis is necessary.

Understanding this analysis is therefore dependent on a thorough reading of chapters six and seven.

In addition to examining the primary and subsidiary questions I will briefly discuss my case study findings in relation to what I judge to be four important debates: the words / deeds inconsistency, the development of consumption patterns, the impact of ethical consumption on the market and the concept of expertise. These are included here because they are primarily to be analysed at the case study level. Chapter nine then moves the focus from case study to consumer capitalism.

### ***8.1. categorising ethical consumers***

In chapter three I proposed three theoretical propositions. These were that there would be:

1. similarities in decision making among ethical consumers with significant conventional religious affiliations, for instance Christians who commit regular time to their church;
2. discernible differences in decision making between these and other ethical consumers and;
3. no necessary similarities between ethical consumers because they may be considered 'information rich'.

During the research I additionally contacted ethical consumers in 'protests' with some expectation that they might constitute a distinct and more radical group. The first complication to my propositions is that although I had expected my contact points or 'habitats' to locate co-researchers in a category, subsequent research places them also in additional ones (Table 5.1). Anthony and Peter frequent alternative venues but are also active in campaigns related to conventional ethical consumer issues. I met Patrick and James through a bicycle protest but they, and especially James, also patronise what I have referred to as alternative venues. Jewel and Robert are involved in the Christian Traidcraft movement but Robert occasionally uses wholefood stores and Jewel has, for instance, attended 'Old' Labour peace rallies. Some like Bob, Elaine, Felicity, Lucy, Misha and Natasha, seem to constitute a group of moderately alternative secular ethical consumers. Apart from Lucy's Paganism, they do not speak of strong religious conviction or of being significantly involved in protest. Nevertheless it would not take much imagination to conceive that Elaine's animal rights fervour or Felicity's passion for women's and human rights might draw them into protest. The theoretical categories I sought to construct have considerable overlap.

I had thought that the prominent aspects of co-researchers' lives would be sufficiently distinct to maintain the theoretical categories. However, Jewel for instance, could be best described as in the long tradition of Christian Socialism where Christianity and socialism are inextricably linked. More importantly examples within theoretical categories are surprisingly varied. In the following reviews of these categories I have two aims. The first is to illustrate the variety that precludes literal replication in the sense of finding similar patterns of consumption among those in each theoretical category. Secondly, I will go on to draw out the themes that I will argue form the basis of a new analysis.

#### **8.1.1. the religious**

My concern here is with Janice, Louise, Jewel and Robert<sup>1</sup>. Janice at first seemed the archetypal religious ethical consumer I had thought to find. She relates strongly to her

evangelical church and for the most part confines herself to its discourse. Most of what she does in terms of ethical consumption is in accord with their dictates; in this sense she may be thought of as following 'Christian rules': deontology. She engages in evolving boycott campaigns such as Cafédirect from supermarkets and other fair trade initiatives, is considering joining the Nestlé boycott and patronising the Cooperative Bank, the latter because of information via the Jubilee 2000 debt relief campaign. This is an oversimplification for at least two reasons. Janice says she follows those recommendations that fit reasonably into what she understands as her comfortable lifestyle rather than uncritically implementing all the church's dictates. On the other hand she, perhaps increasingly, explores the discourses further with enquiry when she feels intuitively uncomfortable with a situation. Such observations are consistent with the view that Janice is rationalising a balance between comfort, in a broadly defined sense, and her view of virtuous living. The purpose in her ethical consumption is both consequentialist in that she seriously expects a positive outcome and virtuous rather than rule following. However, imitation, the close link between church discourse and consumer ethics, clearly underpins her ethical consumption.

This is not the case with the others. Whilst Robert's ideas are closely associated with Methodism, it is predominantly he who produces the discourse. His ethical consumerism is not located in specific boycott and buycott campaigns like those of Janice's church. Although he may subscribe to some of these, his project is founded on a broad concept of responsibility rather than one of attention to detail. It guides him to disassociate from what he sees as the powerful but corrupt. Robert's project does not require him to be an informed ethical consumer but it does require, and he works towards, an holistic Puritanism.

Jewel subscribes to boycott and buycott consumer campaigns but connects to a much broader range of discourses than does Janice: religious, political and quasi-political. Unlike Janice or Louise, she has been immersed in such discourses, she says, since the

early seventies [jew-ssi: 50]. In accord with this she distances herself as a vegetarian from most commercial husbandry but rationalises the comforts of her and her husband's house and car.

It is not just that Louise sees herself as very new to such consumer deliberations that differentiates her from Jewel. Like Janice, Louise has been influenced to buy fair traded coffee, among other such products; an activity Jewel estimates she has been doing for more than twenty years [jew-ssi: 47]. However, Louise's project combines this new venture with something of Robert's Puritanism; *distancing* herself from unnecessary commercialism.

Of course the differences I have described above are frequently of degree as opposed to absolute. Janice has her thrifty tendencies but they are less marked than for the others and, whereas Robert eschews luxuries, she is more inclined to give space to the comforts of life. Additionally differences are reflected in my estimation of co-researchers' faith in positive consequences flowing from their ethical consumerism. Janice's narrative suggests she subscribes to a more evangelical ethical consumption than the others [Table 7.1].

Contrary to my expectations, these ethical consumer projects cannot be said to replicate. As I have shown they exhibit similarities but employ unique combinations and differ in how consumer society is rationalised and the degree of loyalty to its benefits.

### **8.1.2. the activists**

I identified James and Patrick as activists in a cycling demonstration. In the event such activity turned out in both cases to be residual from a more radical past. I argued in chapter five that Anthony's, Peter's and Jewel's various engagement in protest meant that I could include them also in a group of activists. Again the disparities between these five are more apparent than similarities.

Whilst Anthony, James and Patrick live frugally, each on an income well below average by British standards, Anthony alone is dedicated to protest. It would be difficult to

imagine how he could engage in such radical theatre as he describes without a commensurate ethical consumption; they are mutually reinforcing but I have shown where ethical consumption is (mildly) compromised. His ethical consumption is partially achieved by exiting from what he sees as unethical production, substantially through veganism / vegetarianism, and partly by complying with conventional ethical consumer discourse on products such as recycled paper and household cleaners. The credibility of his project lies I would argue primarily with the integration of lifestyle with voicing opposition on related issues.

James by contrast professes, with some credibility, to have forsaken the pursuit of wider change. He has exited from large scale commercial consumption to a position where boycott and boycott campaigns are mostly, but not entirely, irrelevant. For instance he does not drink coffee. However, he comprehensively engages in ethical consumption in the remainder of his purchases by, for example, increasingly buying organic produce. In this sense he pursues an integration of project around minimal but ethical consumption.

By contrast Patrick argues that ethical consumption is technically impossible. Whilst he engages in some selection he rejects the idea of a comprehensive project. He therefore places considerable emphasis on exiting from consumer society whilst rationalising away notions of ethical consumerism.

The contrasts here between Anthony's comprehensive engagement and James' and Patrick's distinct varieties of disengagement is striking. The three have little in common except a low income. It seems to me that Jewel and Peter have more in common with Anthony's ethical consumer project than he has with James and Patrick. Although they may be somewhat less absorbed in campaigns and Peter's income is considerably above average, they also seek to voice their opposition.

### **8.1.3. the 'alternatives'**

By far the easiest ethical consumers to enlist were those who patronise 'alternative venues'. I located Bob, Felicity, Natasha, Peter, Elaine, Lucy, Misha and Anthony in this

way. In the course of the data collection it became clear that Robert, Patrick, and especially Alan and James also frequent such places. I have discussed the distinctions between some of these already and will consider Alan with Belinda below as 'information rich' ethical consumers, so I will concentrate now on the first seven mentioned above. I shall begin by noting the similarity between the first four of these. Each, I shall argue, seeks to integrate the philosophy that underpins conventional ethical consumption with their paid work and in some cases also leisure and lifestyle more generally.

Natasha is involved in the ethics of consumption in a big way. She has seemingly the widest contact with conventional ethical consumer discourses including *Ethical Consumer* magazine. She distances herself from what she sees as unethical consumption through veganism and transport alternatives to the car. At the present she too has compromised on the ethics of what she buys because she has again become a student. However she expects her study to enable her better to integrate future paid work with her notions of ethical living. Rare purchases, furniture and the like, which strictly do not accord with her holistic ethical notion are rationalised by their rarity.

A similar integration of lifestyle is apparent when speaking to Felicity. As I have described, she is active with women's groups and like Natasha her work is orientated towards an aim relevant to conventional ethical consumerism: human justice.

Bob pays so high a financial and attention cost in trying to integrate social work patterns into his life that his wishes to consume ethically are clearly compromised. Although he distances himself through a pescarian diet and engages in some boycott and boycott campaigns, little resource is available for ethical consuming. Some rationalising is necessary, say in relation to his family needs and as justified by time and attention constraints.

Like Natasha, Felicity and Bob, Peter sees his work as integrated with the philosophy that drives his ethical consumption. Uniquely among those I interviewed he develops a

sophisticated argument to support consultancy with both organisations whose aims he supports and those about which he is less enthusiastic. In the latter cases he sees himself as a positive influence. Like the others he subscribes to some buycotts and boycotts but much more than the others he rationalises, drawing boundaries around those activities which offend the philosophy but which he enjoys. This leads me into discussing those co-researchers who rationalise, i.e. have worked out reasons for limiting their ethical consumption.

Lucy engages in conventional ethical consumerism: 'natural' cosmetics not tested on animals, environmentally benign household cleaners, recycled paper products and the like. Thus she addresses the major campaigns but does not become embroiled in more than those. She rationalises this by invoking a religious commitment to enjoyment. Lucy believes she should engage in the ethical issues of her time but in a way that celebrates life and the pleasures that consumer society offers. Her work as a chef accords with this celebration but is not overtly directed towards the issues of conventional ethical consumerism.

Elaine distances herself and her family from her prime concern with animal welfare by being vegetarian. She maintains this by additionally exiting from non-food animal products. However, with this and other issues she rationalises the limitations to her ethical consumption. For example she buys *Quorn*, knowing it is made using non-free range eggs, because she feels a responsibility to vary the family diet. Such rationalisations, including with her work, allow an otherwise conventional if not indulgent lifestyle. She would prefer her work to be more in keeping with her ethical concerns but .....

Likewise Misha distances himself from unethical transportation in his use of a bicycle, but ownership and use of a car would not compromise this belief as he explains [mis-ssi: 223-233]. Engagement in buycott and boycott ethical consumption is necessary but there are times when rational imperatives, duty to parents, pleasure from travel etc., override this.



As with the other theoretical categories there are very different strategies here. The contrast between Bob's intensive struggle and Lucy's celebratory ethical consuming is remarkable. In spite of their similar efforts to ensure they have ethically acceptable employment, Natasha's organised and Felicity's inspirational ethical consumption are very different. And these contrast with Elaine's and Misha's greater segregation between their work and consumption ethics. These differences preclude any notion of literal replication.

#### **8.1.4. theoretical replication**

Had my original theoretical categories proved cohesive I would, under theoretical replication, be considering differences between sufficiently cohesive groups of ethical consumers but for predictable reasons: for example that those with religious convictions rely much more on rules to guide their ethical consumption than those without. In spite of the diversity of ethical consumer projects exhibited by my examples, some similarities, related to how co-researchers maintain their self-sense of being ethical consumers, are apparent. These, as will be evident, cross the original theoretical categories. However it seems appropriate to outline these here both to illustrate the collapse of the original theoretical categories and to further introduce key themes.

James, Natasha and Alan pursue vegan diets. They have all exited or distanced themselves from meat production. I use the word 'distanced' because they have done so as consumers; they have not altered meat production. The vegetarians, Elaine, Patrick, Jewel and Anthony (who says he is vegan at home) have to a lesser extent done the same. Subjectively vegetarianism may be viewed as a compromise as in Patrick's case or a full distancing as in Elaine's. Bob, the piscarian, the low meat, and free range meat eaters have all similarly distanced themselves from those parts of the production system to which they object. Such distancing may not always be as stable as Jewel's long period of vegetarianism [7.2.1].

Similar distancing from car culture was apparent leading to different consumer patterns. Alan, James, Misha, Natasha, Patrick, Robert and, whilst on her own, Lucy all purchase other forms of transport. Again car culture is not significantly affected by the individuals' changed consumption patterns but this is a feature of distancing.

For those who see consumer society as suffused with ethical difficulties, distancing may take on a more comprehensive form. In their clearly differing ways James, Patrick and Anthony have to an extent taken this route with their 'downshifting'. Similar tendencies may be noted in Natasha's consumer restraint with occasional frivolities or Louise's second-hand thrift. The notion of distancing from consumer society or exiting from groups of unethical products is problematical. In each case the co-researcher is practising restraint *within* consumer society and is still dependent on its products. However, distancing so described seems to capture an important element in the response of many consumers to the ethics of consumption and clearly crosses the original theoretical categories.

Conversely Belinda most articulately expressed loyalty to the power of consumer capitalism in providing material welfare. My next key theme is rationalisation of consumer intervention on grounds of ethics. Here ethical consumerism is limited to, and undertaken in, specific circumstances. Rationalisations vary but have the common theme of limiting or bounding attention given to the project. Of course I cannot be concerned with the validity of such rationalisations because they are subjective. However, it is necessary to understand the arguments as sensible or otherwise. What I have referred to as loyalty to consumer capitalism varies from Belinda's explicit endorsement to that implicit in the enjoyment of its fruits: Janice's and Jewel's comfortable lifestyle, Peter's and Misha's holidays, Lucy's food and music for instance. What is common here is the limited form ethical consumerism takes. Janice and Lucy for instance, but others also to differing degrees, become involved in headline boycott and boycott campaigns. In these cases decisions are heavily dependent on ethical consumer discourse. Conversely Belinda

and others who have a more or less limited support for locally supplied goods may make decisions independently: buy local.

Other co-researchers may, of course, also limit behaviour but I am interested in how limitations on such involvement, commensurate with a notion of being an ethical consumer, are maintained. At the risk of oversimplifying, but referring the reader to extensive discussions in the previous two chapters, I note the following limitations to subjective ethical consumption: Lucy by a Neo-Pagan notion of celebrating life; Peter by a similar but secular version; Belinda by endorsement of productive forces and a tendency to act only when she feels injustices are extreme; Janice's relative comfort; Elaine's consuming attachment to animal welfare. Some of these limitations may be fragile. Belinda for instance is close to believing that scientific rigour in evaluation of food production is being circumvented. However, the interesting commonality here is the seeming ability to restrict their engagement in conventional ethical consumer behaviour.

A number of my examples *voiced* their objection to various parts of consumer production. This varies from Elaine's and Janice and perhaps others' letter writing, Janice's, Natasha's and perhaps others' ethical questions to retailers to Anthony's radical theatre [ela-ssi: 90 & jan-att: 103; jan-att: 16-18; 64-65; 101-102 & nat-ssi: 89; ant-ssi: 161-163; 195-201]. In the case of Anthony, ethical consumerism, I have argued, has become an integral part of an holistic project; consumption and voice are inextricably linked.

Similar reinforcing interactions between ethical consumerism and more general life patterns can be suggested in respect of Natasha and Felicity. The data support an understanding that both these women have partners who agree with their views. Gareth is researching Local Exchange Trading Systems for a doctoral thesis that has involved him in examining, and purchasing from, collectively worked organic vegetable allotments. Carol, who is a doctor in the not-for-profit sector, discusses relevant issues she has found with her partner, Felicity [nat-ssi 190-193; fel-ssi: 32-34]. Both Natasha and Felicity tell of organising their working life to complement aspects of ethical concerns

expressed in their consumption behaviour. Both have integrated extra-vocational activities. Peter exhibits similar integration with an activist as a partner, a complex yet integrated notion of work, friendships and some activities such as vegetable growing on a shared, organic allotment. It is important to note at this point the parts of Peter's life which he sees as in opposition to his ethical project such as sporting holidays. Peter offers a good example of someone exhibiting elements of an integrated ethical consumerism with some harmonious and some unrelated life style features.

Although Robert's project is less easy to express in conventional terms as ethical consumerism, there is a sense in which he has integrated notions of responsibility and scale which underpin his consumer behaviour with his work. Belinda's consumer ethic and her work in a scientific discipline, by contrast, are primarily in accord with a consumerist ethos. Conventional ethical consumerism may broadly be seen as in opposition to an *overriding* drive for efficiency in production. It is because the ethic into which she might be said to have integrated some features of her life is not synonymous with much of conventional ethical consumerism that I would not consider her to exhibit the features of integration relevant to this study. It is important to consider this in order to delineate a new theoretical category.

Additionally it must be noted that the common features elaborated above: distancing by exiting constellations of products, rationalising loyalty to aspects of consumer ethos and integrating one's lifestyle within the precepts of conventional ethical consumer discourse, do not themselves constitute discrete categories. My examples of ethical consumers may be said to employ them to differing degrees. However, taken together, I suggest they offer a strong framework within which to understand the behaviour and decision-making of my examples of ethical consumers. I develop this theme further in my preliminary conclusions as it becomes key to my thesis.

#### 8.1.5. the information rich

I contacted Alan and Belinda through their positions in a University. Alan is an academic, Belinda a laboratory technician. Both have wide access to, and a professional interest in, information pertinent to conventional ethical consumption. This, for instance, for both of them includes matters of food ethics. Data collection showed Robert to be an academic with a similar access to information. Misha, a doctoral student in his final year, could gain access to much information. Natasha could, from many aspects, be said to be information rich. Although she is between periods of study her recently met partner is a doctoral student in a relevant subject area. However, since my point can be made by consideration of the three who work in academic institutions, I shall disregard the two students. What concerns me here is the use that the information rich make of that information. My thesis is that access will not make behaviour predictable.

In the interviews I pressed Robert [rob-ssi: 166-169] to suggest that his academic work influenced his attitude to ethical consumption but he declined:

*Robert thought that conversations at church would tend to confirm rather than form his ideas on ethical consuming. When I asked if his work at the Open University influenced his thinking in the area he replied that he thought not although again it might have a reinforcing effect.*

More positively, Belinda believes 'Her job makes her aware of issues rather than it being a reflection of her beliefs.' [bel-ssi: 158]. Alan's work and beliefs are increasingly mutually reinforcing [ala-ssi: 160-163].

All three have access, for example, to information on animal production for human food and, as I will show, some personal interest that might be thought sufficient to stimulate an information search. Belinda's specialist area is anatomy and, not least as a conscientious employee and the wife of an academic in a related discipline, she makes herself familiar with the scientific literature. This includes that on human food production. Robert's daughter became vegetarian and influenced the family's thinking

and Alan's researches for academic courses include the ethics of food production [ala-ssi: 160-161]. Belinda's diet, and consequent food buying pattern, is omnivorous. Robert's is also but he says he has, since his daughter's adoption of vegetarianism, reduced the meat content. Alan's diet and consumption is vegan.

These differences in behaviour, I would argue, can be explained better by their political philosophy than by the information to which they have access. I suggest that Belinda's reasoned emphasis on human well-being, and especially that of the poor, eclipses her concerns about factory farming. Robert's concern for just processes is central to his philosophy. This philosophy admits some consideration of animal welfare but not as a distraction from the bigger picture. Although Alan says he has not resolved the animal rights / human duties conundrum there is evidence that he has in this issue, as in others, engaged in the philosophical debates that run parallel to conventional ethical consumer thinking. In so far as he thinks it possible he has developed a rationale that allows him to respond effectively to his concerns. Not only does this affect his consumer behaviour but also his professional behaviour.

I am aware that arguments could rage about the validity of each of these positions. I suggest that each can be understood within its own terms as rational but the resulting (ethical consumer) behaviour from a given information pool is strikingly different. The information to which Belinda and Alan respond may overlap but whereas the former requires scientific facts for a dispassionate analysis the latter additionally needs to reconsider the philosophy. Robert broadly needs no (further) information. To put it in another way, given further relevant information I suggest each would behave differently.

#### **8.1.6. preliminary conclusions**

I shall address the third proposition first. The presence of information relevant to ethical consumption is not of itself a motive to ethical consumption. To be effective in motivation, information needs to be accompanied by an emotional commitment.

Additionally information does not tend to lead to any particular pattern of decision

making. I want to relate this again to Midgley's philosophical reintegration of rationality and emotion: "The two activities are conceptually inseparable."<sup>2</sup> Prediction of consumer behaviour is, I would argue, not possible without knowledge of a consumer's political philosophy. For this reason I would argue that the data are consistent with the proposition.

The first two theoretical propositions, however, clearly fail. Not only do the original theoretical categories fail to yield clearly differentiated types of ethical consumer, but there are important characteristics common to examples in different categories. On one account individual examples of ethical consumer projects seem unique whilst on the other there are common themes. I would argue that these are:

1. where consumers *distance* themselves from what they see as unethical producer practices. They *exit* from constellations of products. Some strategists take this so far as to consume significantly less than average of their society in spite of a capacity to increase their income and consume more. At its extreme practitioners 'opt out';
2. where consumers tend to *integrate* all aspects of their lifestyle, consumption, work and social activities within the core ideas which also underpin conventional ethical consumption discourses. In this way their involvement becomes their *voice* of objection to what they perceive as unethical practices and;
3. where consumers *rationalise* the attention they give to consumption in terms of their ethics by some variant of *loyalty* to consumer society. Involvement tends to be through prominent ethical consumer discourse advising boycott and buycott of specific products. At its extreme ethical consumption is repudiated.

It is not surprising that I should feel inclined to adopt, and extend, the terminology of Hirschman here. As I shall argue in the following chapter, Hirschman offers a

particularly useful understanding of market relations primarily from the consumer's perspective.

It is because the themes I present above are different from my original theoretical formulation that the original propositions one and two fail.

I therefore have findings that suggest three new theoretical propositions:

1. People exhibit a *wide variety* of consumer approaches to perceived ethical problems in production processes and consumption itself.
2. Some common themes of *distancing*, *integrating* and *rationalising* are apparent in managing the scope, complexity and dynamics of ethical consumption (but these do not correspond to the theoretical categories developed for the purposes of this study).
3. Information or fact is heavily mediated by ethical consumers' political philosophy so that there is no correlation between the enrichment of peoples' information and specific ethical consumer behaviour.

I have reached the limits of my research in terms of the specific predetermined propositions formulated at the end of chapter three. However, there are clearly insistent findings that form the basis of new theoretical propositions for understanding ethical consumers within the terms of the original questions posed in the first chapter. The rest of this chapter adopts a more exploratory approach to develop these findings.

## **8.2. *exploratory analysis***

In the exploratory analysis I am concerned with what Thomas terms 'constructive inference'<sup>3</sup> and such a process requires comprehensive data. I want to restate two reasons why I believe my data are particularly suited to this task:

1. the richness of my data, demanded anyway by the previous supposition of a words / deeds inconsistency, allows different interpretations with only minimal



deficiency of data points (because the theoretical propositions were not preconceived I could not plan data to challenge them), and;

2. the variability of case studies provides fertile ground for analysis.

Two key features are I would argue important in this further analysis. The first is the great variety of the examples of ethical consumer projects in this study. The second is the identification of key themes of 'distancing', 'integrating' and 'rationalising'. Based on the first of these I constructed a framework (Figure 8.1) within which each of my co-researchers could be located. None was of course expected to represent an ideal type perfectly.

Before developing this further, I need to explain a point about the terminology I use in relation to ethical consumer strategies. Hirschman, whose alternative to neoclassical economics was introduced in chapter two, developed a typology of possible consumer responses to a perceived deterioration in producer quality within market relations: exit, voice and loyalty. I use these valuable terms in my explanations. For instance, one theme I have referred to as 'distancing' is, in Hirschman's terms, *exiting* but in a very particular sense. In this project the ethical consumer adopts various arrangements to distance her or himself from the offending producer practice. This may be in specific and now familiar terms such as dietary habits, less familiar terms such as various transport alternatives to car use, or in universal distancing from commercial consumerism often referred to as 'downshifting'. Significantly distancing affects constellations of products rather than specific product *exits*.

In Table 8.1 I have shown co-researcher distancing in degrees of shading. The depth of shading corresponds to my assessment of the degree of completeness.

I have suggested a further response to the challenges of ethics in consumption as integration. In this case the consumer attempts to integrate (and perhaps make sense of)

elements of his or her life. In archetypal cases we might expect boundaries between consumption, work, and leisure to be blurred.

**Table 8.1 co-researcher's 'distancing' strategies**

CS	pseudonym	transport	diet	second-hand	universal
07	Belinda	car // public	omnivore	-	-
06	Peter	car / public	omnivore <sup>4</sup>	-	-
04	Louise	car / bicycle	omnivore <sup>5</sup>	durables	-
10	Lucy	public / car	omnivore (fr)	clothes	-
02	Janice	car	omnivore (fr) <sup>6</sup>	-	-
14	Robert	bicycle / public	omnivore low meat	-	-
17	Felicity	car / public	omnivore low meat <sup>7</sup>	durables	-
09	Misha	bicycle (car)	omnivore low meat <sup>8</sup> (fr)	-	-
03	Bob	car / public	piscarian	clothes	-
08	Anthony	car / public	vegetarian <sup>9</sup>	-	-
11	Elaine	car / public	vegetarian	-	-
12	Jewel	car // public	vegetarian	-	-
05	Alan	pedestrian	vegan	-	-
13	Natasha	public	vegan <sup>10</sup>	clothes	-
16	Patrick	bicycle / public	vegetarian <sup>11</sup>	no-data	'downshifting'
15	James	bicycle	vegan <sup>12</sup>	clothes	'downshifting'

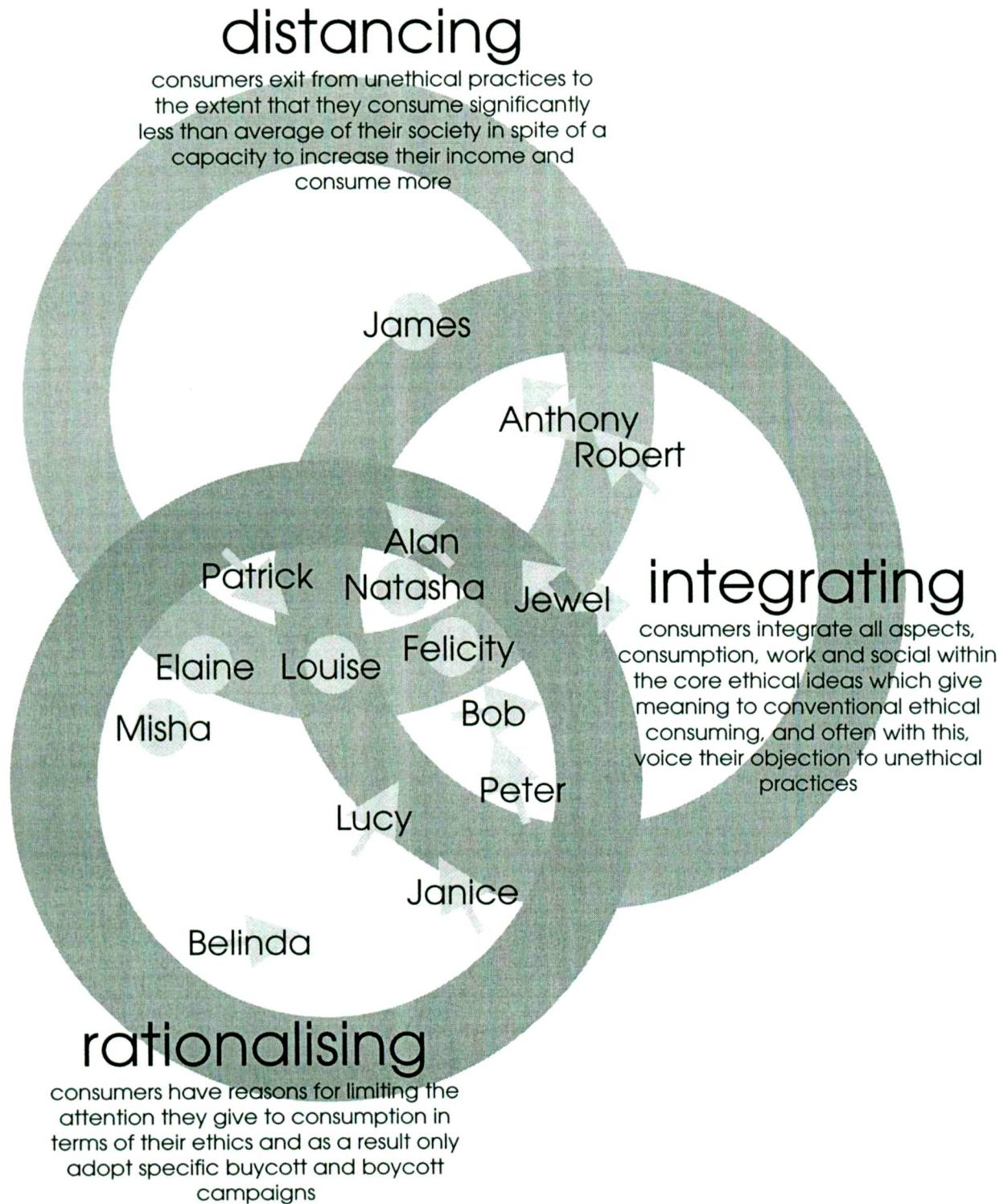
Note: I have indicated co-researchers primary form of transport first. Forms following an oblique are secondary, those following a double oblique are rarely used. I place (car) in Misha's case because he intends buying a car.

A useful adjunct might be Hirschman's term, *voice*. I particularly noted that voicing opposition to elements of consumer capitalism, be it as limited letter writing or taking up much attention, for instance including paid work, seemed important when focused on the same issues as a person's ethical consumption. Ethical consumerism both becomes synonymous with an attention consuming comprehensive concern and dialectically linked to it. In the case of an *integrated* lifestyle, therefore, consumer voice may be subsumed into the comprehensive concern. Ethical consumption can possibly also be circumscribed by elements of that concern which lead to determined action in other forms.

The third reaction to the ethics of consumption I have suggested is that of rationalisation. Hirschman's term *loyalty* is of use here in that unlike 'distancing' and perhaps 'integration', though to a varying extent, consumer society is seen more positively. Consumers may be considered loyal to consumerism in general but ethically concerned in specific respects. Thus the logical response is to address those issues and (selectively) to

support the social discourses of ethical consumerism. These are primarily boycott and buycott confrontational campaigns of *exit* or patronage.

*Figure 8.1 ethical consumer strategies: ideal types*



I must emphasise that in this analysis it is not intended to confer value by the use of particular words. Rather I hope to consider relationships to consumer capitalism and to conventional ethical consumption. Thus rationalisation is necessary where a philosophy has elements at variants with the discourse of conventional ethical consumption and not where it is in accord.

The ethical consumer 'strategies' discussed above, *distancing*, *integrating* and *rationalising*, are in effect 'ideal types'. I have represented these in Figure 8.1 by overlapping circles to correspond to the possibility of combining two or more strategies. Additionally the circles are given broad shaded circumferences. This is intended to avoid the inference that these are quantifiable categories and represent a notion of core and peripheral strategies. I have indicated my assessment of each co-researchers' project as a position on this 'fuzzy Venn diagram'. Since these projects have been discussed in some detail in this and the previous two chapters, I shall offer three explanations of the positions I have suggested and consider three example challenges.

### **8.2.1. explaining co-researchers' positions**

The prime reason for locating Anthony as an integrator is the strong evidence that he campaigns through his work. He is a co-founder of a small theatre company. The presentations which the company stages, or at least prepares, are about justice for both humans and animals in an environmental context. These are key themes in conventional ethical consumer discourse.

It is evident that he would concentrate more on radical theatre were it not for the need to secure income and yet more income he says would facilitate a more integrated lifestyle since he would have time and money to shop at wholefood shops. He is located in the 'integration' circle of the diagram because of the above, and on the periphery of 'distancing' because he is vegetarian/vegan accepting a below average income.

Conversely he is not located as a rationaliser because those rationalisations he makes are between the demands of voicing and practising his philosophy. And that philosophy also

underpins conventional ethical consumption so in other words there seemed few discordant practices.

Lucy is located as a 'rationaliser'. She clearly reasons the limitations to her ethical consumption. Whilst she is duty bound to address the main ethical issues of her time, she is similarly bound to enjoy the bounty of life. The bounty of life here quite specifically includes consumer culture and this is why I have referred to Lucy as *Neo-Pagan*. She believes ethics and celebration will often coincide but where these conflict the prime objective is clear: the latter. In this sense her project is decidedly not about distancing herself from consumer culture. It must be seen as a balance between voicing disquiet about some of its less desirable outcomes and celebrating, among other things, its achievements. Lucy is therefore located on the periphery of 'integration', voicing her opinion, but centrally a rationaliser.

Jewel's case is more mixed. She is a long term vegetarian, thus to some extent *distancing* herself from stock farming. But I have suggested she is on the periphery of this strategy because she rationalises her car use and moderate home comforts against, respectively, a perception of environmental damage and western profligacy. Most noticeably however, Jewel has for many years been deeply involved in processes paralleling, or directly contributing to, the production of ethical consumer discourse. Involvement in Christian socialism and more centrally movements for justice in international relations including fair trade clearly from an important part of her life. Her previous work as a teacher is not inconsistent with this and for this reason I have located her project within 'integration' but on the peripheral intersect between 'rationalising' and 'distancing'.

Because of her expressions of failure, I must acknowledge tensions in her ethical consumption project. She seems uncomfortable both when she fails to achieve her own involvement standards, as when she thought of herself as always buying fair traded coffee, and about her relatively comfortable consumer lifestyle. For these reasons I see further tendencies towards 'distancing' and 'integration'.



### 8.2.2. challenging co-researchers' positions

I have clustered many of my examples of ethical consumers around the intersection of the ideal types suggesting they have adopted a mixture of strategies. Co-researchers in some cases distanced themselves from unacceptable consumption, whilst rationalising other practices and integrating some aspects of their lives. Alternatively there are co-researchers I have assessed to be primarily adopting a single strategy. In these cases I have an opportunity to consider with more clarity a challenge to the position I have assigned. I am interested therefore in looking for contradictory evidence: that James could be a 'rationaliser', Elaine an 'integrator' or Belinda's ethical consumption might be understood as 'distancing'. These three examples will form the basis of my challenge as follows.

For James to be considered a rationaliser I would need evidence that he exhibits some *loyalty* to consumer society. Several possibilities present themselves: travels abroad, expenditure on comics and dance and drama classes. It must be noted that all of these are achieved, not only within a relatively low income but also an income *level* which James seems to control. In other words he adjusts his income to his planned optimal expenditure rather than maximising income. Additionally, each of the behaviours can be seen in some way as consistent with his general anti-consumerist and social philosophy. However meaningful the concept, and I have no evidence either way, James sees his carefully selected comics as forming a library which has a local social function. The dance and drama classes are of a scale and intimacy commensurate with James' concept of responsibility for his actions.

I know little of his travel abroad except that this had been some ten years ago in India, Thailand, Indonesia and Nepal. It marked a turning point for James from what he describes as a conventional lifestyle. James spoke as if he might travel again. In two ways these seem unlike consumerist holidays. There is no sense of regularity; the annual or triennial break. Secondly, James travels light. All his possessions, apart from his bicycle

are stored in a single small cupboard. In that sense he lives where he travels to. For these reasons there seems little support to consider James' project to be a rationalisation of a more consumerist lifestyle.

For evidence of 'integration' of Elaine's life with the ideology of conventional ethical consumerism I would need to show that aspects of her life, other than specific ethical purchases and general consumption practices, are in accordance with that ethos. I could consider, for instance, her employment, leisure and voluntary work. The first is the least promising since Elaine herself sees her work as contrary to her (ethical consumer) beliefs. There is no specific evidence of why she tolerated this apparent inconsistency although she says she would like to make a change. The household income is above average for a family of four since both adults work and I would surmise that she would like to maintain that level. If this is so then integration of ethics and paid work is a lower priority than income maintenance.

By contrast her leisure and voluntary activities present better possibilities. Elaine deliberately takes what she refers to as holidays in 'run of the mill places'. Destinations, for instance, include the East Coast of the USA. This illustrates Elaine's concern not to despoil further paradises. Similarly when she takes a more local holiday she says she fills her 'people mover' with family members to reduce the unit environmental impact of travel. There is a real sense in which modification of lifestyle could be argued here. Alternatively, both of these may be seen as rationalisations of a more consumerist holiday and I have no evidence that these holidays themselves were related to issues of ethical consumerism, e.g., that they incorporated attendance at a convention of animal rights. Elaine's membership of campaign groups, rationalised to six, includes involvement in street collections and writing letters. These activities correspond to conventional ethical consumer discourse. There is however, no evidence of greater involvement in these groups such that other activities, perhaps even her ethical consumption, are compromised. Thus whilst there are some clear linking factors in Elaine's life the

evidence is inconclusive and her employment is clearly to the contrary. I judge this not to be compelling evidence of a drive to integrate all around the philosophy underpinning conventional ethical consumption.

Belinda's location as a rationaliser is premised on her espousal of the providence of consumer society. Evidence that her ethical consumption might be understood as 'distancing' herself from particular aspects of that production might be found in her behaviour. In this respect I will consider her patronage of local farmers, purchase of charity cards and attitude to novel foods.

Whilst the purchase of Christmas cards seems too small a commitment to constitute distancing herself from either commercialism of the celebration or the greeting card industry, her patronage of local farmers is perhaps significant. Belinda associates local farming with tradition, high quality products and variety. However, to be recognised as distancing from mass consumer production retailing I would expect a greater percentage of her shopping to follow the pattern. It does not, at least in part because her lifestyle dictates she saves time and money at convenience supermarkets. There is perhaps a complicating and fundamental dichotomy here between Belinda's espousal of industrialised farming *and* of traditional production. Nevertheless the important factor to note is that the espousal of factory farming seems to diverge from conventional ethical consumer discourses and the patronage of traditional methods insufficient to set Belinda's consumption apart from a consumerist ethos. I would argue that rationalisation is significantly more apparent than distancing here.

Having established my 'ideal' types, I want to review four related topics: the 'words / deeds inconsistency'; the impact of ethical consuming and; the concept of expertise. I shall then return to develop the central thesis.



### **8.3. 'words / deeds inconsistency' revisited**

In what ways and to what extent has my study resolved the supposed inconsistency? I would argue that two linked notions dissolve the 'words / deeds inconsistency' and throw light on the manner by which other research in this area is often carried out. These are the frame of bounded rationality itself and, secondly, what Hirschman<sup>13</sup> refers to as 'slack': the lag between a system's adaptation and its changing environment. In terms of bounded rationality I shall particularly refer to 'stoppage'; the term Langrish uses to refer to factors preventing otherwise likely changes.

I shall illustrate my argument by reference to three examples, Belinda, Peter and Elaine. Without singling them out these cases are telling in that they exhibit tensions in different ways. In each case I shall outline an inconsistency, and discuss the resolution by reference to one or more of the theories above.

Belinda says that she is quite concerned about factory farming [Table 5.3]. She is, however, an omnivore who apparently makes no commensurate response either in her diet 'exit' or activities 'voice' to address this concern. If preferences were supposed to correspond to behaviour, we might *prima facie* expect some response. We might note that both Robert and Misha who registered similar degrees of concern say they have reduced their meat eating and the latter has often gone to some trouble to buy free range products [Table 8.1]. But Belinda does not. Certainly as a partner in a two career family with children, with some justification, she sees herself as busy [bel-ssi: 123-124]. Busy people, we may presume, do not undertake changes lightly and so we might expect some *stoppage* here. More importantly, Belinda's reported attitude and recorded behaviour alone would not be sufficient to understand her position. The present holistic study allows us to reason as above that Belinda has *loyalty* to scientific farming methods because of their efficiency in feeding people. From his reported scepticism about organic produce, we may presume that such a view is strongly supported by her husband.

Reservations are however expressed by Belinda which give a clue to what she feels she is agreeing to in the questionnaire. She is concerned that insufficient research is being carried out to ensure that methods aimed at increased efficiency in production are safe for humans. Further deterioration in this respect might well trigger a change of behaviour; the *slack* between this attitude and behaviour could be cut. Her concerns, however, are not so much with industrialised stock production *per se* but with the manner of its execution and in a questionnaire such fine distinctions are frequently lost.

As with Misha, there are seeming inconsistencies between Peter's concern for the environment [Table 5.2] and some of his behaviour. Like Anthony, Robert and Natasha, Peter reports being very concerned about, for instance, Ozone layer depletion. Unlike them he uses a car, albeit sparingly. But were I to have limited my research interests to his ethical concerns I would not have asked about his pleasures. I would not have learnt he is passionate, among other things, about sporting holidays abroad [Table 7.2] to which he flies. Additionally I would not know that Kath, his partner, amplifies his concerns for the environment.

Peter is a man who loves sporting holidays and has a concern for the environment not simply the latter. As with Belinda, I would speculate that if the human environment were to be seen as very much more endangered by air travel Peter would reluctantly rethink his priorities.

As with the others I have previously explored Elaine's case. She reports being quite concerned about adverse trade conditions with other nations. She might be expected, say, to *patronise* fair traded tea and coffee or to *exit* from these products altogether. For Anthony I have no data but Peter invariably buys fair-traded coffee and Natasha is both knowledgeable about the issues and says she consistently uses fair traded products [pet-ssi: 32-36; nat-ssi: 176-178 & Appendix N]. Each of these reports a similar level of concern. However I learned that coffee is one of Elaine's extravagances and she believes the fair trade products to be inferior. If I may be permitted a final speculation in this section, I

would suggest that if Elaine were, by chance or design, to see at first hand the conditions under which her beverages were produced she might change her practice. I suggest this because she tells us that her clearly impassioned relationship with animal welfare is based on real events and high emotion [ela-att: 58-61; ela-ssi: 27-30]. She gave up her passion for leather shoes because of this [ela-att: 15-17]. Equally if a new fair trade product were launched which she regarded as of sufficient quality and to her taste she might change even if the price was much higher. Again Elaine is a woman who is concerned about unfair trade *and* loves 'good' or 'fashionable' coffee. She is not only the former.

Before offering an analysis I want to add two further points about positivistic data collection methods such as my preparatory questionnaire. Patrick refused to respond to my questionnaire on the grounds that he would be forced to misrepresent himself. Having listened to his philosophy I can only agree with him; attitude surveys report convergent concepts. Secondly, Alan, a committed vegan, reported being very concerned about animal testing for medical purposes [Table 5.5]. His relative lack of concern about factory farming and cosmetics testing seems contrary. Is that a rational response by someone who believes that the arguments about the latter are so well established as to be of less concern? In both situations questionnaire results fail to reflect divergent concepts. We do not have to agree with the philosophies above to accept that they offer understandings of rational positions. My argument is that most supposed inconsistencies can be explained by further understanding of the person's complex tastes and emotions. It is in this way that rationalisation, an understandable personal position differs from an incomprehensible inconsistency. What tension remains is not surprising if Hirschman's notions of loyalty and slack are adopted. Thus an apparent words / deeds inconsistency could arise from research in two ways:

1. through disembodied research where attitudes and / or behaviour are taken out of context and;

2. when a theory is used that demands an immediate correspondence between (singular) preferences and behaviour; that is to say without 'slack'.

Accordingly I reject the concept of inconsistency. The behaviour of an individual is to be compared with their own subjective political philosophy, albeit formulated and practised in a social context. Ethical consumers judge themselves in this manner. And 'slack' is the almost inevitable and necessary delay in behaviour of a complex human in a dynamic environment.

#### **8.4. 'ethics' in integrated consumption patterns**

Pantzar<sup>14</sup> argues that:

*... the place you live in, the traffic vehicles you use, the kinds of shops you go to and the food you eat are to some extent related to each other, and thus decisions concerning each of these are mutually interdependent.*

Although Pantzar's work is obviously more extensive and theoretical than this simple formulation, it makes a useful starting point for a limited analysis. His argument developing a systems approach to consumption can be represented, in terms of this study of people with choices, by two 'idealised' diagrams [Figure 8.2 & Figure 8.3.]. I have added occupation because it helps establish a possible connection between an expensive lifestyle and limited time. The relationships are tendencies or influences rather than deterministic causes.

*Figure 8.2 intensive ethical consumer lifestyle system*

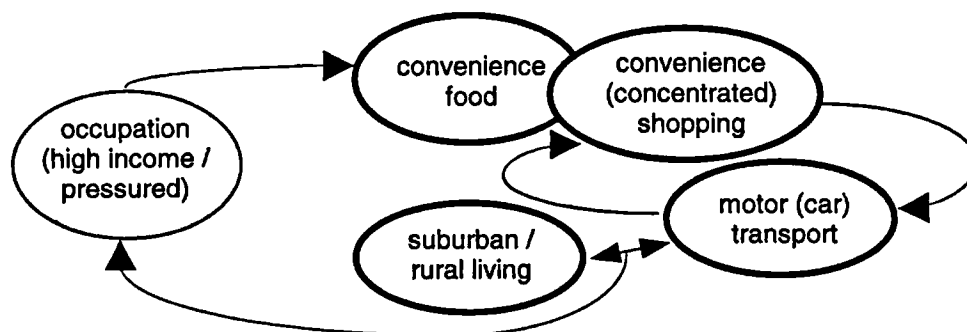
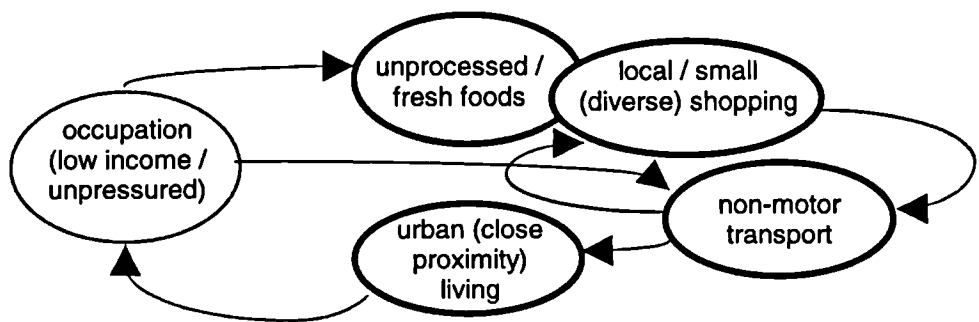


Figure 8.2 represents the notion that, starting at almost any point in the system, say motorised transport, the others follow. A remote location is possible but because suburban houses and cars are expensive a low income occupation is not an option. A pressurised occupation is more likely which in turn increases the probability of fast food and convenient ‘one-stop’ shopping. Most supermarkets are remotely situated and presuppose the use of a car.

*Figure 8.3 the ‘alternative’ ethical consumer lifestyle*



The alternative system functions similarly where, say, less demanding work gives time to shop locally for fresh food but does not provide the income for motorised transport. Although a close proximity to shops and employment, urban living, is therefore necessary, shopping is time consuming and cannot be accommodated with pressured employment.

I have extracted the relevant data on my examples of ethical consumers and presented this in Table 8.2 to facilitate examination. The cases are ordered in terms of shopping habits and I have dark shaded my assessment of intensive lifestyle indicators and unshaded intermediate indicators. Clearly there are those whose lifestyle conforms to the prediction: Janice, Elaine and Belinda developing an intensive lifestyle as against James’ and to a lesser extent Patrick and Natasher’s unintensive lifestyle. There are, however, important anomalies. Alan, but more so Robert, combine above average income with unintensive lifestyle practices. In both cases it may be that a better understanding of their employment would offer an explanation. Conversely the intensity of Bob’s and

Anthony's work pays little but links them into an intensive consumption cycle. Whilst the findings are, therefore, not entirely consistent with the predictions there would seem to be scope for developing this systems approach further.

*Table 8.2 co-researcher's key lifestyle indicators*

<i>cs</i>	<i>pseud'm</i>	<i>occupation</i>	<i>income</i>	<i>dwelling location</i>	<i>transport</i>	<i>shopping</i>
12	Jewel	retired teacher	average	suburban	car // public	cooperative <sup>14</sup>
02	Janice	health promo'n trainer	above av.	suburban	car	supermarket
04	Louise	primary teacher	average	suburban	car / bicycle	supermarket
11	Elaine	tax consultant	above av.	suburban	car / public	supermarket
03	Bob	marketing consultant	below av. (↑)	urban	car / public	supermarket
06	Peter	management consultant	above av.	urban	car / public	supermarket
08	Anthony	director / performer	below av.	urban	car / public	supermarket
07	Belinda	laboratory technician	above av.	suburban	car // public	supermarket
10	Lucy	chef	average	suburban	public / car	supermarket
09	Misha	doctoral student	average (↑)	urban	bicycle (car)	supermarket
17	Felicity	solicitor	above av.	urban	car / public	supermarket <sup>15</sup>
16	Patrick	unemployed <sup>16</sup>	below av.	urban	bicycle / public	supermarket / wholefood
13	Natasha	shop assist. (student)	below av.	urban	public	supermarket / wholefood
14	Robert	inspector of schools	above av.	urban	bicycle / public	local / supermarket,
15	James	baker / cycle repair	below av.	urban	bicycle	wholefood
05	Alan	lecturer	above av.	urban	pedestrian	wholefood

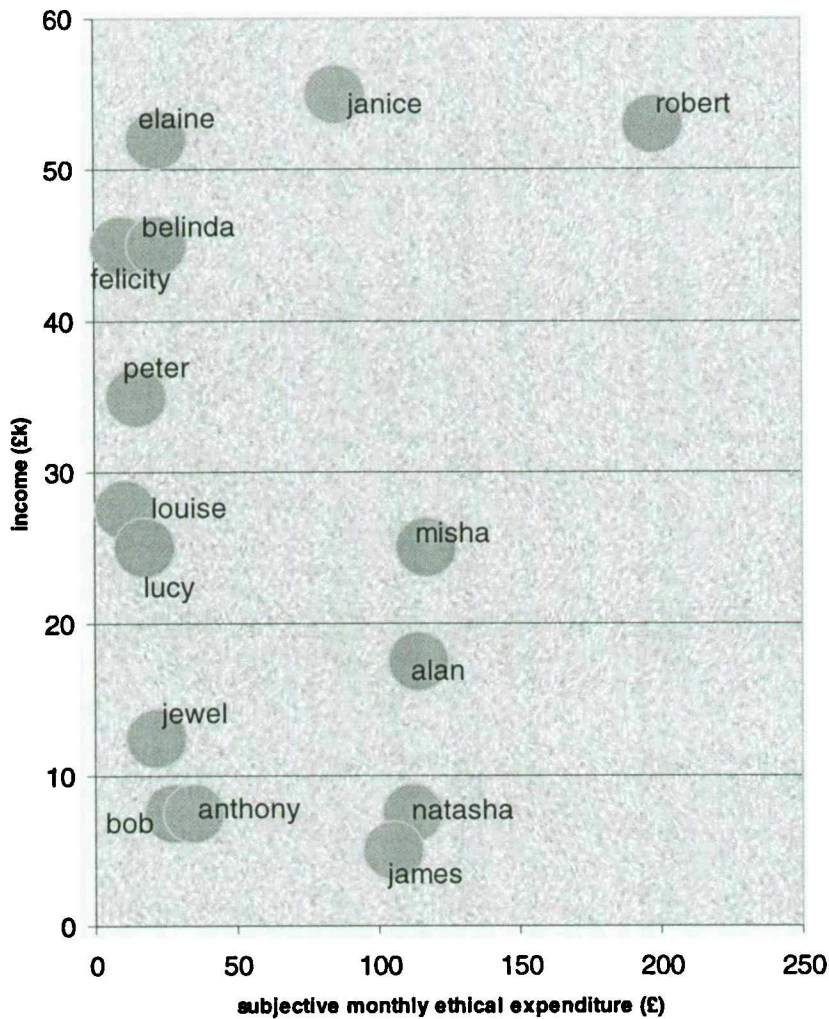
Note: (↑) indicates an expectation of a higher income.

### **8.5. the impact of ethical consuming**

Two co-researchers have deliberately limited their income. Others see themselves as restraining their consumption. However, their stated household incomes vary substantially from under £5,000 to over £50,000 per annum. Is 'downshifting' incompatible with ethical consuming, or conversely, is the opportunity to shop ethically and have a financial impact enhanced by increased income? The idea is explored in

Figure 8.4 where I plot my calculation of subjective ethical consumption against stated household income.

Figure 8.4 ethical consumption by income



Note: Janice's household income is known to be considerably above £50K but is estimated.

Although subjective ethical consumption is a problematical concept it embodies a useful notion of engagement or *attention* given to a project. This is to some extent an indication of the degree to which a co-researcher sees themselves as actively pursuing their ethical consumer project. There are particular problems with defining the scope of ethical consumption where people have, for instance, adopted a special diet. In this respect I asked Elaine to distinguish products bought because of her vegetarian diet and, not unsurprisingly she thought this too difficult [ela-ssi: 19-21]. Additionally, where ethical

consumption is subjectively defined, and pursued, as patronising small shops expenditure will tend to seem relatively high in comparison to one defined as purchasing selected 'campaign' products. Finally, projects are relative. For example Robert considers purchases from small shops to be by definition ethical. All James' purchases are from small shops but he seems to require additional criteria most notably that they be organic. What I find interesting in the scattergram is the apparent lack of pattern. Reduced income may reduce the possibility to engage in ethical consumption and increased consumption may enhance capacity, but ethical consumers do not necessarily do more because they have the opportunity.

I want to make one further point about the impact of ethical consuming. It may not be apparent that distancing, which I am using to refer to a comprehensive consumer exit, should be considered a consumer *action*. It may be helpful, however, to consider such individual behaviour in terms of collective actions. So, for instance, the effect of a significant proportion of the population distancing themselves from factory and/or intensive farming, is to put pressure on those industries to change. In addition most distancing exits lead to complementary patronage. Vegetable food production, cycle makers, public transport suppliers, second-hand dealers etc., all benefit. Those who distance themselves from some forms of production are, therefore, rightly considered in terms of *consumer* ethics. However these considerations are better developed in the next chapter.

### **8.6. *is a concept of expertise useful?***

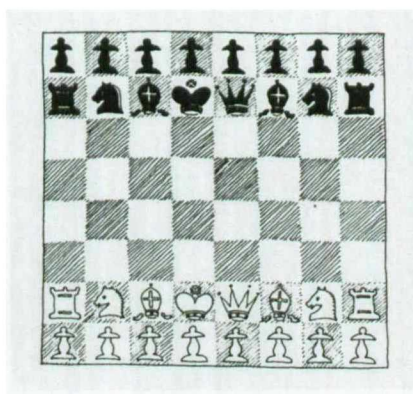
Here I consider Simon's concept of a process change between novice and expert and the possibility of applying this to the role of 'ethical consumer'. This is because it may further explain how people construct themselves as ethical consumers. To what extent then can the notion of progression from rule following to intuition be applied to the data? Simon, and his contemporaries, have been fascinated by the possibility of applying notions of bounded rationality, derived from observation, to game theory with the intention of



reapplying the findings to 'real' decision making situations. I have above said that I am not interested in decision engineering. However, there is a *prima facie* case for the existence of such a process since conventional ethical consumerism seems to rely on knowledge of the game where not all is immediately revealed. Louise for instance sees herself as a novice making mistakes. Whereas Janice is thinking of joining the Nestle boycott Jewel has subscribed for so many years she has lost touch. There seems to be esoteric knowledge: '99' tea is fair traded; this company has bought that; this product contains that unethical ingredient; current campaign thinking dictates one should target this retail outlet. The progression from Janice's imitation to Robert's prejudice seems to be that from novice to expert. All this presents an attractive pattern.

However, my analysis suggests that ethical consumerism is not a single game; only some of my co-researchers are playing by the rules of (market) chess<sup>17</sup>. Conventional ethical consumption with its specific issues and evolving discourse may be a candidate for notions of expertise. Consumers may get a feel for unethical processes. Why else did Janice ask her room maids what they earned if this were not synonymous with Simon's second stage application of learned rules?

*Figure 8.5 Chess*



However, Robert (and Patrick) is not primarily concerned with the minutiae of boycotts and boycotts; the confrontations of conventional ethical consumerism's chess game. They may have little hope of succeeding but they want to change the game. Their prized knowledge is theoretical not empirical.

Similarly the stakes for which Anthony plays are more political. Rather than specific strategic moves on the board he aims at persuasion. To continue the metaphor he (and Robert) might want to rearrange the pieces on the chess board so that the powerful ones protect the pawns<sup>18</sup> [Figure 8.5].

### **8.7. *answering central and contextual questions***

In the first chapter I asked the following central question: in the cases where consumers *do* make decisions on ethical grounds, how do they do so in potentially so daunting a decision making environment? From my data I suggest three conceptual strategies. To indicate these are not in an intended order, I employ bullet points:

- ‘Distancing’: Consumers exit from common consumer practices and effectively translate consumer decisions into philosophical decisions: ‘should I intervene in practices to which I do not subscribe on ethical grounds but which continue in the society in which I live’. Although this displaces a decision from immediate ‘every-day’ consideration I shall argue in the next chapter that escaping the consequences of production is becoming less viable.
- ‘Rationalising’: Within a broad acceptance of consumer capitalism, consumers limit their involvement with ethical consumption employing a variety of rational arguments. Additionally, they employ ethical consumer discourse on specific matters only. This simplifies decision making.
- ‘Integrating’: Consumers become deeply involved in practices consistent with conventional ethical consumer discourse. The discourses provide both the rationale which they relate to other areas of their life from consumption and for the restricted attention they can give to specifics, including consumption.  
  
Decisions are effectively prioritised by their commitments.

I asked three subsidiary questions. The first was how do consumers sustain their notion of themselves as ethical? Because I have understood consumer ethics in terms of three conceptual forms it is useful to follow that format. However, since no pure form was encountered it must be supposed that justification of behaviour would be complex.

- Those who exit, distance themselves from producer practices they perceive as unethical. They may see themselves as virtuous to the extent that they are not personally responsible for those practices or their consequences.
- Ethical consumer boycott and boycott confrontational campaigns are aimed at change. The supporter may see themselves as ethical to the extent that s/he plays their role in the consequentialist action.
- The deeply committed may see themselves as ethical to the extent that they are involved. To an extent inconsistencies may be traded off against positive actions.

The second subsidiary question asked, what attention is given, and importance attributed, to ethical consumption? Answering this question depends not on the strategy adopted by the ethical consumer but on political philosophy. In each case above two extreme scenarios are both possible and are illustrated in Table 8.3.

*Table 8.3 attention to ethical consumption*

<i>involvement in conventional ethical consumption:</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>
<i>project (prime strategy)</i>		
<i>'distancing' (exit)</i>	ethical issues of remaining consumption are taken seriously but are of manageable scope (James)	residual ethical consumption requires little attention. (Patrick)
<i>'integration' (often with voice)</i>	key themes are given very significant proactive attention but ethical consumption cannot be separated out (Anthony)	ethical consumption is framed in broad strategies perhaps with a very limited response to some boycott or boycott campaigns (Robert)
<i>'rationalisation' (with loyalty to consumer ethos)</i>	highly committed to a limited number of dedicated ethical consumer discourses but resolutely partitions this from some other parts of life (perhaps Janice)	heavily dependent on ethical consumer discourse(s) for limited consumer action (no example in this study)

Where I am prepared to offer an example from among my co-researchers to approximate the theoretical positions these are in parenthesis. As with such analytical patterns not all positions may be viable. A few observations are necessary. In spite of what I believe to be

an important description, low involvement integration seems a contradiction in terms.

This is only the case however if ethical consumption is assumed to be entirely deliberative and therefore an intensive pursuit. Similarly each of the low attention positions implies a degree of rationalisation in the sense used for that substantive category. However 'distancing' arguably obviates the need to rationalise. There were none among my co-researchers I would be content to describe as low involvement rationalisers. It has been pointed out to me that such a group might include the very numerous young clientele of the Body Shop<sup>19</sup>.

Although my study did not produce an example I would unequivocally be prepared to describe as a 'high involvement rationalist' the position may still be valid. Janice, for instance, may be said to have a moderate and perhaps increasing involvement in ethical consumption. Additionally I speculate that the theoretical position might usefully be applied to celebrities associated in a high profile way with say fair trade, animal rights and/or environmental campaigns.

Thirdly what, if anything, stops ethical consumers from changing their consumer behaviour further? From the data I can argue that some things do stop ethical consumers. However, because in some situations consumer's ethics may be heightened it may be appropriate to broaden the question. Social processes [6.1.6] and especially relationships would appear to work both ways but it would be difficult to estimate the power of restriction or enhancement. Beyond that I have argued that it is primarily a person's political philosophy that is important in deciding how information is interpreted and behaviour modified.

### ***8.8. chapter summary: examples of ethical consumers***

The primary focus in this first group of discussions has been to analyse the theoretical propositions posed in this study. The original theoretical categories were found to be untenable. As expected it was shown that information is mediated by political philosophy; the provision of information does not necessarily produce commensurate

action. In spite of the mostly negative results set out in my preliminary conclusions, I have argued that it has been possible to go beyond the original propositions and draw out from the findings of the previous two chapters a way of understanding ethical consumers in terms of patterns and projects. Whilst a striking feature of the data is the variety of projects in a small number of examples, I have proposed three theoretical ethical consumer 'ideal' projects. These are:

- 'rationalising' ethical consumption against a consumerist perspective;
- 'distancing' from perceived unethical consumption and production and;
- 'integrating' lifestyle around the philosophy that underpins ethical consumer discourse.

I have located examples within this tripartite framework noting that some projects seem more stable and predictable but others more contingent.

Whilst the opportunity to consume ethically increases with income and expenditure, the recorded (subjective) ethical consumption in absolute terms seems independent of income. This is apparent over the considerable range of income in this study and is consistent with the foregoing conclusions.

I have used my data to criticise the concept of a words/deeds inconsistency and set out the usefulness and limitations of the concepts of patterns of consumption and expertise in ethical consumption. Some ethical consumers seem to 'distort' the predicted systems of consumption while the apparent variety in consumer projects means that there is no single 'game' in which to be expert or novice.

Finally, my framework can be used to answer the central and contextual questions set out at the commencement of this work. Rational decisions can be made in daunting circumstances, I conclude, but in each case the strategy or strategies adopted limit the necessary decision making.

## notes and references

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- <sup>1</sup> I exclude Lucy because as a Pagan she is not part of a 'recognised' religion.
- <sup>2</sup> Midgley, (1996), p148.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas (1998). See also 'analytic induction' in Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) and 'inferences to the best explanation' in Mukherjee & Wuyts (1998).
- <sup>4</sup> Peter buys meat [Tesco 12/8/97 receipt] and critically considers the issues associated with organic production.
- <sup>5</sup> Louise did not raise the subject of her diet but her receipts include meat and fish products [fourth week receipts].
- <sup>6</sup> Janice discusses her purchases of free range meats and a few difficulties at some length [jan-ssi, 8; 63-67].
- <sup>7</sup> Felicity speaks of substituting for and rarely eating meat [fel-ssi, 42].
- <sup>8</sup> Misha, who says he was previously vegetarian, discusses the amount of meat he now eats [mis-ssi, 56-57].
- <sup>9</sup> Anthony is vegetarian [ant-att: 5] but buys some 'vegan' products.
- <sup>10</sup> Natasha says she is vegan [nat-att, 42].
- <sup>11</sup> Patrick says he used to be vegan [pat-ii, 35].
- <sup>12</sup> James says he changed from vegetarianism to veganism a little over a year ago [jam-ssi, 61].
- <sup>13</sup> Hirschman (1979).
- <sup>14</sup> Pantzar (1995), p122.
- <sup>15</sup> According to Felicity she has no particular shopping pattern [fel-ssi, 22].
- <sup>16</sup> Although Patrick is technically unemployed I have referred to him as an amateur philosopher in his synopsis because of his dedicated pursuit of recording tradition mostly in terms of the built environment and his concurrent articulation of a traditionalist philosophy. He seems to attend to this at least as rigorously as if he were employed to do so.
- <sup>17</sup> I use this metaphor because Simon and colleagues derived much of their data from observing people playing chess.
- <sup>18</sup> Transfer to a figure: 'People's chess' by Andrew Squire - Leeds cards.
- <sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Alan Thomas at the OU for this important insight.

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## 9. heroes of consumption

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It is tempting when setting ethical consumerism in a wide social and political context to be concerned solely with whether 'consumer activism works'. The New Economics Foundation<sup>1</sup> (NEF) for instance recently published a review addressing this question and a special issue of *Development*<sup>2</sup> set out numerous conflicting arguments. Such approaches start from the critique of consumer capitalism current in conventional ethical consumer discourse and seek some role for consumers in ameliorating the problems. Thus Simon Zadek & Franck Amalric say of contemporary affluent society that although the profit motive may be the driving force, consumers may have a transformation function<sup>3</sup>. In such formulations consumers are cast as 'heroes of consumption'. The arguments that aggrandise ethical consumption are frequently set against a particular understanding of market processes and tend to review relatively recent history.

Certainly such a debate is useful. Wanting to adopt a somewhat wider perspective however, I believe it is first necessary to consider whether a resolutely consequentialist philosophy is the sole appropriate perspective from which to discuss the phenomenon. According to my data consumers themselves adopt a variety of philosophical positions to justify their actions and it seems appropriate for me also to consider a variety of perspectives. But even within a utilitarian framework I wish both to take a longer historical view and to set out an explicit understanding of a social and economic structure within which the notion of contemporary ethical consumption arises. I shall outline changing thinking on ethical consumption and examine and compare particular cases: clean clothes, the coffee trade, meat and its alternatives, the infant formulation boycotts and financial services. Each of these was significant for my co-researchers and therefore affords an opportunity to contextualise insights.

This concluding group of discussions will therefore be concerned with how ethical consumers relate themselves to the wider socio-economic context: the nature of ethical

consumption in consumer capitalism, the activism, systems of provision and the business of marketing. The political philosophy will be addressed in the concluding chapter. The examination of context, however, is not intended to constitute an exhaustive review. It is rather a sufficient outline to locate and discuss the study findings. My purpose is to offer a concluding understanding of my empirical research.

### **9.1. *how are we to consume?***

Not all co-researchers argued that the consequences of their actions were what was important to them and among those who did there was some pessimism. Some undertook considerable action without much expectation of positive effect. Part of this commitment can be ascribed to some co-researchers' sophisticated handling of the 'context illusions'<sup>4</sup>; they are able to justify small gains in otherwise overwhelming situations. I will discuss this further, but to restrict analysis solely to asking 'has ethical consumerism worked' seems to me to ignore an important motivation.

I argued in the introduction that ethical consumerism was an inevitable consequence of consumer capitalism. The data refines this perception. By supporting the notion that some consumers would endeavour to develop ethical 'projects' whether or not these had 'progressive' effects the data directs us towards concepts of duty and virtuous living. James, for instance, is clear that he must develop the virtue of compassion and we may presume that some courage is necessary to embark on a course so evidently at odds with the direction of much of 'post scarcity' society. Similarly Robert must see little evidence of society turning away from mass shopping or individualised motor transportation practices. Like Robert, Natasha 'couldn't bear to do nothing about the problems she perceived'<sup>5</sup> even if her behaviour proved ineffectual. Ethical consumerism is, I must conclude, a phenomenon at least in part independent of its consequences. I suggest that many people make efforts to consume ethically but this is as likely to manifest itself in *virtuously* distancing themselves from what they take as unethical practices or conversely *dutifully* engaging in ethical practices because it is right to do so as it is for them to have



regard for the general outcome. What is important here is that the process is not wholly dependent upon 'success' in a general social sense. We should not be surprised therefore to observe a continuation of the phenomenon in the face of perceived failure.

### **9.1.1. the 'ethical primate' consumer**

Perhaps the first view of ethical consumers I should present therefore is one of individuals adapting to live, admittedly in their very different ways, ethically in affluent society, a society increasingly defined by its consumption. By so doing they engage in what Singer distinguishes from the trivial choices of consumer capitalism as 'the ultimate choice'. These choices, our actions as consumers, are part, albeit a minor component, of the many phenomena on which Singer bases his understanding of 'how we ought to live'. Singer's<sup>6</sup> examples of people's ethical behaviour, deliberately I think, push wide the bounds of what is ethical:

*We act ethically as consumers, too. When the public learnt that the use of aerosols containing CFCs damages the ozone layer, the sales of those products containing those products fell significantly, before any legal phase-out had come into effect. Consumers had gone to the trouble of reading the labels, and choosing products without the harmful chemicals, even though each of them could have chosen not to be bothered.*

That individuals are sufficiently motivated to act, he argues, in what is not immediately their own self-interest, to waste time on selecting products no more useful than others, is for Singer important. That there is a collective effect is of secondary importance.

Such aggregation of individual actions, however, is not to be confused with the *philosophy* of individualism. Giddens<sup>7</sup> usefully distinguishes between a new individualism, freed of tradition but therefore necessarily confronted by moral responsibility in a social context and the New Right's (now old) egoethical concept of the individual. Thus although these individual concerns may have effects, beneficial or otherwise, what is important in this

first conceptualisation is the notion of an ethical, social individual. The method of enquiry set out in chapters three and four presupposes a social individual.

Such a view, of course, finds theoretical and empirical support elsewhere. Midgley's view of the ethical primate introduced in the second chapter conceptually accords with it.

Ölander and Thørgesen's review of studies of environmentally relevant behaviour for instance report similar findings to mine. They identify a 'felt moral obligation' as a key motivational factor in pro-environmental consumer action.

Conversely the language of activist and most academic discussion is that of consequences and it is to this that I now turn. A number of questions arise in this perspective. To what extent could 'ethical consumerism' be considered a political project? Could it be successful in changing society and finally, in so far as it is portrayed as a project, what is its ideological underpinning?

## ***9.2. an historical perspective***

Analysts are right of course to review recent campaigns that enlist, or respond to, consumer action: the Global Action Plan; the Apartheid and baby milk substitutes boycotts; child labour campaigns<sup>8</sup>; campaigns on fair trade<sup>9</sup>; packaging<sup>10</sup>; waste separation<sup>11</sup>; renewable energy<sup>12</sup> etc. However this tends to reinforce a notion of a new phenomenon and therefore that we might talk about progress or otherwise over a short time scale. Whilst I will review these arguments I want to begin by suggesting a longer history.

If we consider ethical consumerism to be actions taken by people, beyond subsistence production, who consume but are concerned with what they (collectively) see as an ethical deterioration in the processes by which their, and others', products are delivered then a long history may be proposed. Indeed Zadek & Amalric<sup>13</sup> in a review of recent activism argue:

*.... that consumer action can be understood to include far more, say, than the threat of boycott, in that it also encompasses a broad range of civil actions 'outside' of the narrow commodity market that nevertheless are focused on securing the right and ability to acquire and consume appropriate products and services on reasonable terms.*

Within such a definition I may at least include much of the history of cooperative retailing and production; Gabriel & Lang's 'first wave'. The watering of beer but adding poisons to restore the flavour, the adding of lead to increase the weight of bread and chemical powder to whiten flour were all eighteenth century unethical practices<sup>14</sup>. Some of the early cooperators could doubtless have exited from such products but chose to develop retail systems to also benefit other consumers. Further back we may perhaps include some of the so called 'bread riots' during early profiteering. In notable cases early consumers appropriated the product, sold it at a 'normal or fair' price, 'paying the money and returned the bags to the owners'<sup>15</sup>. Subsequently some producers saw it prudent to lower bread prices.

From such a perspective I would argue two points. Firstly, that consumers have long been engaged in 'negotiation' with producers. Secondly, that in each of these cases *some* consumers (and some producers) have been engaged in the matter from not entirely self-interested motives. Rather they have pursued a notion of social justice.

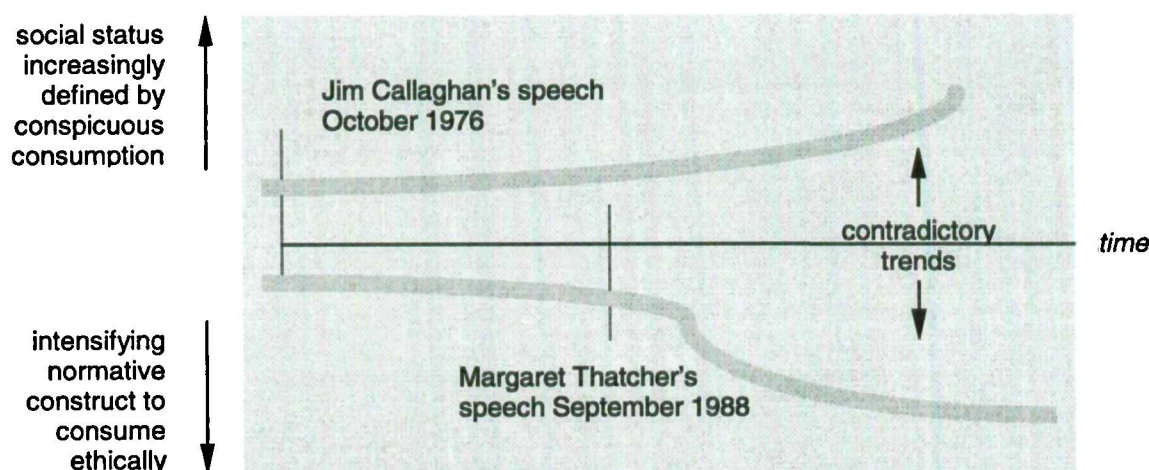
The negotiation between consumers and producers has taken different forms as production has re-presented ethical dilemmas but to speak of success or indeed failure without wider reflection does not seem entirely appropriate. By re-presented I mean that, for example, food adulteration occurred in the eighteenth century, underwent a number of manifestations but may be seen again strikingly in the contemporary industrialisation of agriculture<sup>16</sup>. Consumer, producer debates about bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) can be argued to be a current food adulteration crisis. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) raise new ethical dilemmas in the very long term industrialisation of

agriculture. Contemporary discourse on social justice in production, currently referred to as business ethics, similarly I would argue is a globalised re-presentation of the ethical trading debate that previously contributed to the localised bread riots. Thus whilst my examples of ethical consumers do face new situations I want to suggest some sense of continuity.

### 9.2.1. contradictions in consumer capitalism

Equally I want to be careful to avoid over simplifications that present consumers as victims of capitalism or locked in to an endless struggle with the forces of production. As I set out in the introduction I believe people's behaviour to be incomprehensible merely in terms of consumption fulfilling need. Lunt & Livingstone's empirically based formulation that consumers are concerned at the loss of traditional certainty whilst simultaneously enjoying the fruits of consumer capitalism, seems to me to capture something of our dichotomous engagement with the consumer environment. The consumer environment is in this conceptualisation dynamic and I would want therefore to consider something of its recent development.

*Figure 9.1 contradictions in consumer capitalism*



Others have argued that a significant watershed in the break-up of the post war political consensus may be symbolically associated with Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College Oxford<sup>17</sup>. Callaghan, then a prominent Labour government minister, acknowledged the

importance of individual parental (consumer) opinion (choice) in education. This marked a significant stage in the move from municipal provision. Following this the growing inequality of society has allowed, or paralleled, the New Right establishing a social order that relies more on the conspicuous consumption of material goods than tradition to denote social position.

In the contrary direction, however, the *establishment* of green issues on the political and public agenda has been taken to date from Thatcher's 'green' speech to the Royal Society<sup>18</sup>. I have represented this contradiction in Figure 9.1 between the growing acceptance, or in some cases promotion, of individualised consumption and the increasing rhetoric from government and other institutions towards constraining consumption for environmental reasons.

As many commentators point out<sup>19</sup>, consumption and marketing are, in principle, directly opposed to the environmental movement. Baudrillard's analysis of the contradictions in the promotion of car use while placing social restrictions on it, is instructive to recall. My argument is that although I would want to trace a long engagement between consumer and producer, the conjuncture within which ethical consumers are to be understood in affluent society is specific. Stretching what Lunt & Livingstone say, consumers are both committed to consumer society and ethically concerned about its implications. Many obvious parallels may be found among my examples of ethical consumers and therefore the adaptive projects they adopt are instructive.

### **9.2.2. sustainability and levels of consumption**

A major debate within this growing dichotomy is on sustainable consumption in a global context. It derives from the debate on sustainable development and Zadek & Amalric<sup>20</sup> argue that sustainable consumption is a 'fundamental ingredient' of sustainable development. I would argue that those who begin thinking of their consumer choices in ethical terms are likely also to consider these practices in terms of sustainability.

Additionally, issues such as fair trade are integral to the idea that in order to achieve

sustainability the Majority World must become *more* prosperous. Conversely sustainability implies that the affluent must restrain consumption. Issues of the welfare of animals in mass production have been closely associated with such a debate<sup>21</sup>. Increased meat consumption, made possible by mass production, is said to be energy intensive and have environmentally damaging effects. More obviously 'green' consumption, including ideas of maintaining present consumption levels but with very significant increases in productive efficiency, the so called 'factor 4' and 'factor 10' technological solutions, is part of the debate on sustainability. Thus I agree with Zadek & Amalric that sustainability and ethical consumption are inextricably linked.

There is a rapidly expanding body of writing on sustainable consumption but I want to focus on one particular theme; the escalation of affluent consumption even where there is an intention to restrain it. This may best be illustrated by Pål Strandbakken's<sup>22</sup> re-analysis of the efforts of a number of Norwegian environmentalists and lifestyle activists to reduce their consumption during the late seventies. Strandbakken notes changes in consumption, both increases and the significant reductions, reported by the original researchers, over a five year period but introduces two significant qualifications. The first is that the group enjoyed a higher than average consumption, manifest in relation to consumer durables, and, importantly, most had moved into larger and more expensive houses and flats during the study.

Significant parallels with the ethical consumers responding to my survey may be drawn. James, Patrick and Natasha may be said to restrain their consumption in accord with the anti-consumerist discourse. Lucy at the other extreme views her consumption as facilitating the collective celebration of life. In between, and I would include myself in this description, ethical consumption more often rests on a notion of what I would describe as thrifty affluence. This seems to me similar to Strandbakken's portrayal of the Norwegian project; restraint may be measured therefore in relation to a rising affluence rather than any absolute level.

To summarise, I have conjectured an ongoing discourse between consumers and producers but in new globalised circumstances. Producers and affluent consumers have materially much to gain from consumer capitalism. However, these circumstances make more apparent the contradictions between consumption and sustainable development, post scarcity and social justice, animal welfare and food plenty etc. Each of these is brought into sharp conflict.

### **9.3. *the economic framework within which to understand ethical consumption***

Having rejected neo-classical economics as an adequate discipline through which to understand the relationship between consumers and producers, or more properly that discipline having disqualified itself by its heroic assumptions, I think I need to say something of an alternative. I have argued that not all ethical consumers say they want to change the world. Still, however pessimistic some are about the possibilities, I may theorise that, in common with activists, most have a vision of better things. What I am concerned with here are the market systems within which ethical consumers act. I specifically want to relate ethical consumer behaviour to the seminal work of Hirschman<sup>23</sup>. His thesis was that consumer behaviour, either *exiting* from a product or *voicing* unease in times of degrading of product can be related to their relationship or *loyalty* to the relevant producer organisation. Greater loyalty, he argued, is likely to delay exit and increase the propensity to, and insistence of, voice prior to exit.

Hirschman's work, with one revision (see 9.3.2), is particularly important here for two reasons. Firstly, he deals with situations where an organisation is in some sense in decline and ethical consumers may be supposed to recognise specific private producers as in moral decline. Secondly, he offers a comprehensive alternative model to the neo-liberal economists' reductionism. Economists recognise consumers' rational decisions to prefer one product to another. As they exit from one and patronise another, as 'sovereigns' they regulate the market, and do so by the 'invisible hand'. However, ethical consumers can be

vociferous in their opinions. Anthony's radical theatre, Alan's, Natasha's, Janice's and Elaine's letter writing to producers and the debated issues in shops are examples. And ethical consumers offer views on the nature, limitations and possibilities of their consumer politics [7.1.1]. Hirschman's model is clearly superior in assessing such phenomena. The following sets out and considers two specific market failings in relation to ethical consumers within Hirschman's framework.

### **9.3.1. exit and patronage: boycott and buycott**

In classical economics the market assumes importance because consumer preference (singular) is assumed to send unambiguous signals to producers and suppliers. This is primarily conceived as a linear relationship. The more a product is purchased at a profitable price the more it is produced by self interested producers. It is a happy coincidence that production given some response time precisely accords with consumer preferences. By contrast, Hirschman provides the framework for considering complex market relationships.

Recent events in the world of the ethical consumer would be useful to illustrate the shortfalls in neo-classical conceptualisation. For some years the Fair Trade mark has been awarded, by an independent review organisation, to beverages produced by small scale farmers organised in cooperatives and marketed by voluntary organisations in affluent countries. Recently however a multinational has gained the mark for one of its products. The dilemma is set out by Simon Birch<sup>24</sup>. Briefly, Ridgeways the brand in question is owned by a multinational, its chairperson was Defence Secretary during the Falklands war and the corporation has a large stake in meat and poultry production. Here are a myriad of reasons why ethical consumers *might* boycott Ridgeways: anti-war, animal rights, small is beautiful. And yet a counter argument could be put by reformists. By ensuring that Ridgeways fair trade brand is very successful the market could be taken as indicating that ethics make good business. With characteristic confidence in market mechanisms, Birch concludes:



*Ultimately of course it comes down to us, the great buying public, and whether we choose to boycott Ridgeways because of its meaty parent company or support its work in giving tea pickers a better deal. Both buying decisions are sending strong signals to Hillsdown - and giving Sir John something to think about whilst the tea's brewing.*

Although Birch is right that the growing overall value of the fair trade beverage market is sending a signal, in respect of the fragmented response of ethical consumers to Ridgeways he must clearly be wrong. If the brand sells below expectations the company is likely to conclude that the 'ethical' market will not support a mainstream brand whereas there has been a complicated set of conflicting responses. The effect of some supporters of Fair Trade boycotting the product and others buycotting it would be to cancel each other out. When lumped together such 'signals' could not be distinguished from consumer apathy. There is ample evidence in this study to support the idea that an 'ethical' product may be viewed so differently by two potential consumers that one buys and the other rejects. We might for instance in this case suppose that the church organisation to which Janice belongs might publish an article arguing that Ridgeways should be supported because it is a step in the right direction. At the same time Elaine might read in her radical animal rights magazine of the dreadful misdeeds of Ridgeways' holding company. Both co-researchers are supporters of the idea of fair trade and might respond to concerns about Tanzanian growers. Together they might send a strong signal of support for this new fair traded product or conversely of distrust. If they were to act separately in different ways this would not send a strong signal; voice, as Hirschman observes, is required for this.

### **9.3.2. loyalty**

Hirschman makes a distinction between private goods from which he says consumers may meaningfully exit and public goods from which they may not. In the former case sufficiently dissatisfied consumers simply stop buying the product and need no longer

care about any further deterioration in the organisation. By contrast, he argues, the actions of public organisations remain of consequence to members of the relevant society. So for instance Hirschman says that a parent may opt their child out of a deteriorating state education system but cannot escape the consequences of living among a poorly educated population.

However, his distinction between private and public, made in the late 1970s, is becoming, certainly for the ethical consumer, untenable and thus needs revision. Although the ethical consumer may exit from, say, McDonalds, as in the case of Felicity<sup>25</sup> it is not unlikely that they will consider that company's actions to remain of great significance. This could, as with McDonalds, be the case across all the classic ethical consumer issues: environmental, corporate behaviour, and animal welfare. And this not least because the impact of 'externalities' of many corporations in terms of revenues is comparable to that of the GDP of middle rank countries<sup>26</sup>. I could therefore *rework* Hirschman's formulation thus: "If I disagree with an organisation, say a [corporation], I can [exit] as a [customer], but generally I cannot stop being a member of the society in which the objectionable [corporation] functions"<sup>27</sup>.

Therefore ethical consumers must be considered as 'members' (Hirschmans term), or as more commonly understood 'citizens', in the same way as Hirschman accords that status to those exiting public goods<sup>28</sup>. For this reason, Hirschman's analysis of members' behaviour with regard to public goods may be translated to private ones in respect of ethical consumers. It is instructive to follow Hirschman in his description of this 'wholly new type of loyalist behaviour' in the following *reworded*<sup>29</sup> terms:

*In line with common sense (and the theory of demand), the propensity to exit has thus far been presented as a rising function of discontent with product quality [...]. Now it can be shown that the invariant or even inverse relationship between these variables is possible in the case of [corporate] goods.*

Some ethical consumers are likely, to the extent that other concerns allow and in line with their political philosophy, to remain engaged, even to intensify engagement, after exit. This is because they see themselves as unable to escape the effects of multinational corporations.

I want to stress two points in addition to my general preference for 'real world economics'<sup>30</sup> over neo-classical economics. The first is that in accordance with my theory and empirical findings, *voice* is to be accorded an important position in ethical consumerism. The second is, in contemporary society *exit* or *distancing* are not necessarily to be considered 'final' acts in economic behaviour.

#### **9.4. ethical consumer discourse and the campaigns**

In this section I intend to look briefly at the recent formation and reformation of ideas about the 'ethics of consuming' and particularly the relationship between co-researchers in the study and those (changing) discourses.

The crux of much uncertainty about the right direction of contemporary ethical consumer activism [6.1.5] seems to me to derive from two competing ethical consumer discourses. The first to establish itself saw separation from consumerist society as the aim of ethical consumer activism. Products and producers are approved that are seen as ethical but integral to this is their separation from global market production; small independent companies, often not-for-profit, retailing products through 'alternative' shops. Because of this separation, commercialisation is rarely an issue in such a discourse; ethical is defined in opposition to commercial production. Problems however may arise, for instance, when an independent producer is bought out by a large company.

The other, following the more or less inevitable marginalisation or 'failure' of alternative production and consumption to impact on consumer society, is a more interventionist discourse. In this ethical products compete directly with others in commercial retail situations, social entrepreneurs establish 'ethical' brands and seek to widen market

niches. Commercial enterprises are necessarily evaluated, and pressed towards ethical production. Here, to achieve mass appeal, commercialism is inevitably a component. These divergent discourses co-exist in contemporary Britain and to different degrees underpin the ethical consumer projects examined in this study.

#### **9.4.1. the boycotts and buycotts**

Contemporary attempts to harness collective consumer action to trade and development issues were first formed around not-for-profit and cooperative ventures. These were an alternative, and broadly in opposition, to the mainstream commercial production. Such ventures would include the blooming of wholefood cooperatives and the establishment through NGOs of outlets for majority world products. Traidcraft for instance was established in 1979 to market craft products from the Majority World to the affluent consumers. In 1977 the long boycott of Nestlé products for irresponsible marketing began. Such *buycott* and *boycott* ventures may be seen as raising issues of trade relations and food products in a political context. However, the buycotts were destined to remain marginal in market terms and the boycotts addressed only worst practice. In the former there was arguably a mismatch between product and consumer demand whilst the latter would proliferate to the extent that they crowd each other out and many consumers would be confused<sup>31</sup>. Ethical consumption would remain a market niche and the promoting organisations, charitable in character. By the mid 1980s a rethink was taking place within the NGOs. Market research, reviewed in chapter two, was suggesting more potential than had been tapped. If ethical consumerism was to be consequentially effectively harnessed it needed to break out of the niche. Two parallel approaches emerged therefore. The first as described above and the second to influence commercial production in what might usefully be referred to as a second generation of interventions.

#### **9.4.2. fair trade and Codes of Conduct**

Instead of purely punitive boycott action coupled with the 'charitable' promotion of disadvantaged products activists sought more directly to influence commercial producers

positively. In parallel with similar moves in other affluent countries, such as the Netherlands where early initiatives were developed, organisations setting and monitoring standards for commercial production were established. The Fair Trade Mark, for instance, was established in Britain by a consortium of NGOs in March 1994. The Fair Trade Foundation was designed to set social standards for industrial sectors reliant on small producers but where such producers are disadvantaged. Much of their work has focused on coffee production (Figure 9.3) but it includes tea and confectionery and has recently even included a fair traded football.

The coffee market is of particular interest because of its high international trade value. The initiative had the expressed purpose of empowering small producers otherwise exploited by larger commercial structures. The approach fits into the rethink because the mark is applicable whether products are delivered through purely commercial or not-for-profit companies and the aim is to accredit fully competitive products. To buy Cafédirect, for example, is not intended as representing a charitable act but an excellent coffee fairly traded. The emphasis is on building links between producers and affluent consumers such that the *process* of trade is just.

It is designed to empower small producers and it works towards a 'just' trading relationship. Thus defined fair trade has a limited application. Additionally, to the extent that small suppliers are replaced by large companies, the process will be applicable to a diminishing base.

Conversely the establishment of 'Codes of Conduct' is aimed at the major commercial sector. Its potential scope is therefore not limited. New Economics Foundation<sup>32</sup> (NEF) identify five ways of establishing codes:

- *self declaration* - corporate brands backed by a self-proclaimed code of conduct;
- *industry body* - benchmarks or codes of conduct devised and administered by sectoral associations;

- *partnership* - a stakeholder approach to standards based on wide agreement;
- *NGO-led* - process standards set by independent organisations and delivered through alternative or commercial companies, and;
- *official* - standards set by governmental or inter-governmental organisations.

We should add to *NGO-led*, in this list, independent commercial and not-for-profit standards. Codes of Conduct set standards that may include labour relations, wage levels and conditions of work etc. Kite marks generally indicate to consumers with which codes the products have complied. What seemed clear from the limited but valuable research NEF<sup>33</sup> carried out was that social labels rooted in the civil networks were far more likely to be recognised by consumers than those imposed by officialdom. This was they argued because achieving general recognition for the latter, say the EU Eco-Label, proved a far greater problem than had been anticipated.

Detractors<sup>34</sup> point out the danger of the establishment of minimum standards and the problems of 'cherry picking'. The latter occurs when a company represents limited examples of good practice as if they were indicative of their general practice. Even supporters concede problems with monitoring compliance<sup>35</sup>. Additionally as was to some extent the case with the government sponsored Ethical Trading Initiative, agreement among stakeholders can be difficult. Supporters of Codes of Conduct often see themselves as realists. To address the major ethical issues in business, agreement between stakeholders is necessary.

From the viewpoint of consumers, social labels may ease the choice of ethical products. A number of pointers may be added to the discussion from my research. It is unlikely that there is an infallible rule that consumers will accept an independent label more readily than a corporate one. Very significant differences between my examples of ethical consumers on how they regard the same 'label', say the Cooperative Bank's or the Body Shop's ethical trading standards, or even the FairTrade mark, suggest the complexity of

underlying problems must be taken into account. For example, Bob, Natasha and Robert take an altogether more sceptical view of corporate standards than Janice and Misha. And although Alan buys fair traded coffee, he does not see this as a panacea since coffee is a cash crop frequently grown in countries where, in his opinion, growing staple foods could be seen as preferable. The consumer perspective on social labels seems to be guided by individual political philosophies, albeit formed in social relations. There may be an incorrect presumption among activists that given the 'facts', as represented by a social label, (ethical) consumers are bound to react positively.

However, in terms of drawing more people into politically active consumerism such diversity of response may not be a problem. In this respect more research is clearly needed among 'armchair ethicals', the people on the very fringe of ethical consumption. Most but not all ethical consumers purchase the kinds of products likely to be labelled. Some projects, however, Robert's of course, but potentially others, focus on the shopping process rather than specific products. Where products are important a *single* social label may be assimilated into shopping practices. It is not clear however what the effect would be of a Kitemark led ethical consumption. Whilst there are instances where social labels, the RSPCA's 'Freedom Food' for instance, are accepted by a consumer intuitively valuing the accreditation of an independent reputable organisation, it is equally clear that, in some circumstances, the process of acceptance can take longer. The decision as to whether the Cooperative Bank's self-declared ethical policy was valuable, for instance, seemed to require some attention. My co-researchers' use of Eco-Labels on white goods seemed somewhat arbitrary. Additionally, where standards develop, as in the case of the Cooperative Bank for instance, reappraisal cannot be ruled out. In such theoretical circumstances, ethical consumption again becomes a *highly active* process. It is from this perspective that I would suggest supporters consider labelling either as a cumulative process with probable limitations or, alternatively, as an indicative process mostly aimed internally at business ethics.

### 9.4.3. measuring success

Consumer action, I have argued, in support of fair trade is not new but many of the current approaches are still in development. The theoretical basis for consideration of the success or otherwise of such action is also developing. Arguments forwarded to justify what the NEF refer to as 'networked' consumer action seem to fall into five categories<sup>36</sup>:

- *measurable benefit* - that there are direct beneficiaries, (labouring) children, small farmers, animals etc., of ethical consumer actions;
- *influence* - that whilst the direct impact might be proportionately small the indirect impact on multinationals is of growing significance;
- *capital accommodation as a cost* - evidence of changes in corporate strategy to avoid the impact of orchestrated consumer action may be viewed positively since compliance may ultimately carry lower costs than avoidance;
- *agenda changing* - that ethical consuming challenges the hegemony that there is no alternative to egoistic consumption, and;
- *agenda setting* - ethical consumerism raises important issues (of unjust trading, environmental degradation, animal welfare etc.) that may not otherwise be placed on the political agenda.

It is difficult, and perhaps wrong, to try to separate causes and effects. However, I shall make reference to these terms (in *italics*) when I consider ethics in particular systems of provision (9.5).

### 9.4.4. advice to ethical consumers

In addition to the above NGO discourses there have been attempts to inform consumers across a range of ethical issues as opposed to mostly utility issues as with *Which?* magazine. In 1998 the *Guardian* regularly included a Thursday four page consumer section. From September of that year one column was entitled 'A weekly guide for the shopper with a conscience' dealing with such current issues as buying bananas. Ethical



consumers had clearly moved from the periphery to the mainstream. At the end of the year however the section was cut from four to three pages and, I was informed by phone, this column was one of the casualties. Ethical consumers, we must presume, do not form a sufficient constituency of Guardian readers.

*New Consumer*, one of two magazines dedicated to informing consumers on ethical issues, ceased publication in 1994. The other, *Ethical Consumer* (EC), has a low circulation, which has not exceeded 6,000 since its launch in 1989. Only two of my examples of ethical consumers were aware of EC, only one making extensive use of it. The dearth of general integrated information to consumers on ethical issues may reflect the difficulty of multi-issue ethical consumption, the greater concern with other egoistic interests and / or the exclusive concern with specific issues. By contrast most of my co-researchers picked up some information via specialised magazines, newspapers and general media.

### **9.5. systems of provision**

As stated in the second chapter key writers in consumption theory have argued that consumption should not be analysed as if production were an irrelevance. For this reason I want to return to the 'vertical' analysis of Fine & Leopold's<sup>37</sup> 'systems of production' and Warde's<sup>38</sup> 'episodes of production and consumption'. Here I will consider issues identified by co-researchers: food ethics; boycotting Nestlé, buycotting fair traded coffee, clothes ethics and ethics in financial services.

#### **9.5.1. food ethics and animal welfare**

In recent years food ethics in Britain has gained an exceptional prominence in the media<sup>39</sup>. This occurred first through the unfolding BSE debacle. It has been strengthened by continuing food poisoning scares<sup>40</sup> and crucially by the adverse public reaction to genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Clearly this powerful reaction cannot be linked unquestioningly to the ethics of consumption. Indeed if we argue, and I would, that concern with personal health should be considered as a self-interested motive then it follows that much of the concern measured by market researchers is not to be considered

'ethical'. However, there are no clear divides here and it is equally certain that the above issues elicit strong views about the supply, production methods, quality and distribution of food for humans, concentration of knowledge and means of production, our treatment and use of plants and non-human animals and the non-food flora and fauna with which we share an environment. Thus the industrialisation, concentration and globalisation of agriculture and food production, a process clearly documented by Lang<sup>41</sup>, raises ethical issues rooted in changes established long before the most recent crescendo of concern. Reflecting this, my co-researchers can be shown to have concern both for personal well-being in swiftly changing food supply circumstances and also with many of the wider issues set out above. It is for these reasons that it is right to consider food ethics as a legitimate area within which to place the ethical consumer. Such a consideration may of course additionally be set within a context of increasing national and international debate about the ethics of human food production.

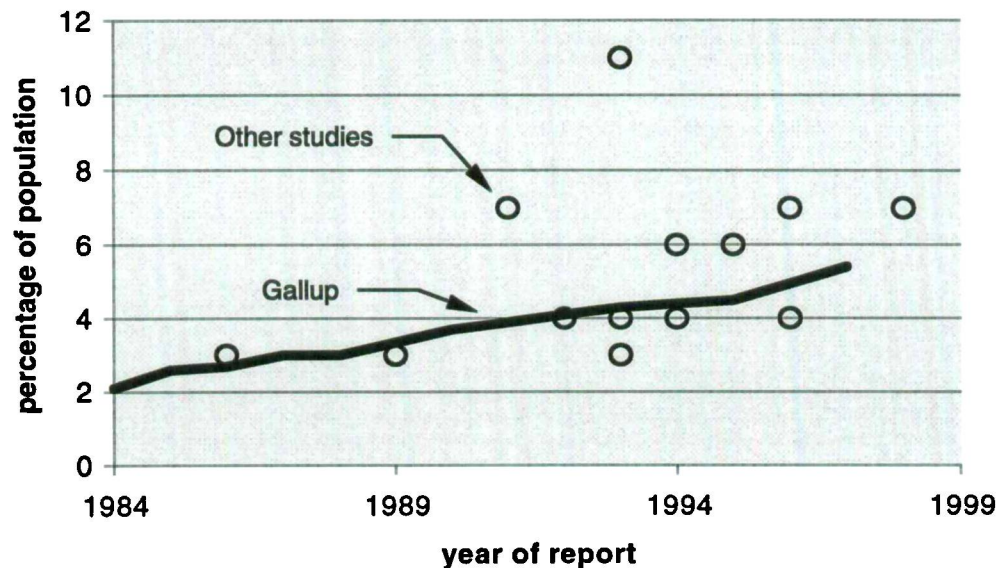
Among my examples of ethical consumers the majority could be shown as having modified their diet. Some for instance had reduced their meat consumption and or taken to buying free range animal products. Others had adopted a vegetarian or vegan diet. Some were increasingly buying organic produce. Since fieldwork was undertaken during the period when issues surrounding GMOs were just becoming public but before the blanket coverage in early 1999, I may confidently predict that now there would be an even greater concern (about personal health but also wider ethics) among my examples.

Both because the issue was discussed by co-researchers<sup>42</sup> and because it provides an example of interaction between consumers and producers the case of diet change with respect to meat is useful.

Whilst there is disagreement on the extent of diet change in Britain in the last quarter of this century, that a change has occurred is not doubted. Figure 9.2 shows there have been wildly differing estimations<sup>43</sup> of the move to vegetarianism; perhaps the most surveyed of

the dietary phenomena. Although the figures are further complicated by respondents' confusion over the meaning of the term<sup>44</sup>, Gallup indicate a clear trend among consumers.

*Figure 9.2 reported vegetarians as proportion of the British population*



Later surveys add the words 'and eat no meat at all' to their survey questions. This trend is supported by, among other things, data on the rising value of retail sales of 'vegetarian foods' to £328m in 1998<sup>45</sup>. Such consumer action, of which most of my examples are part, makes this an important case to consider in terms of consequences. Whilst a wide variety of motives may be presumed to underlie such moves, such as health concerns<sup>46</sup>, fashion, animal welfare etc., market research suggests a strong element to be the latter<sup>47</sup>.

My co-researcher Alan is probably right to argue that market impact has been exerted by the greater number who have reduced their meat intake challenging a long term trend towards greater meat consumption<sup>48</sup>. This reduction was noticed before the recent BSE problems. Gallup surveys in the mid-1980s found nearly a third of adults interviewed reporting eating less meat than previously<sup>49</sup>. The variety of diet change and therefore consumption habits, the relative variety of discourses or proliferation of small pressure groups, Vegetarian and Vegan Societies, Compassion in World Farming etc., suggests a heterogeneity of consumer action but with considerable impact.

The reaction of the food industry is fragmented but it certainly has been *influenced*. Small numbers of meat producers have moved to supply organic or free range meat whilst the majority have defended their 'industrial' product. A powerful section of the agricultural and food producer industry has sought to combine the widespread consumer concern for animal welfare with an intensification of industrialised non-animal food production. Engineered and genetically engineered 'novel' products afford far greater control to the producer and can potentially replace much of the market for meat. Large retailers have seen increases in sales of engineered products such as Quorn and Textured Vegetable Protein, respectively worth £15m and £6.5m in 1993<sup>50</sup>, but at the same time as a consumer reaction has been *voiced* against GMOs.

It is easy to illustrate that the issue of animal welfare, albeit often in combination with concerns of human health, has got on the *agenda*. The EU, for instance, is currently considering a *measurable benefit* of regulating upwards the size of animal cages<sup>51</sup> in factory farms and is locked in a trade dispute with the USA over the issue of hormone use in dairy cows. Previously 'economic' considerations have predominated in these areas; *agenda change*. Similar trends are occurring in other European countries especially Germany and the Netherlands. The First Congress on Agricultural and Food Ethics was convened in 1999 to address these problems in an integrated way. Such mainstream academic events would, I suggest, have been inconceivable twenty years ago.

The move by producers to capitalise and expand the market for meat substitutes has proved lucrative if not entirely unproblematic. Differences of opinion among customers however may be shown by contrasting Anthony's argument against engineered substitutes with Elaine's conditional welcome of products such as Quorn. Providing the product does not contravene any of her animal welfare requirements, Elaine sees such substitutes as desirable. A contravention, the use of factory farmed eggs in the product, is weighed against other desires and imperatives. Elaine has voiced her opinion to the producer on this matter. Conversely, Anthony as a vegan eats vegetables and so by

definition, he says, needs no meat substitute. In this case, the fractured consumer response to industrialised animal production allows room for considerable producer manoeuvre towards greater control within food production. Additionally demands for regulation, in this case of meat production, "... affects the competition between different capitals [...] within [the] sector ..." <sup>52</sup> thus further advantaging non-animal production. Volkert Beekman <sup>53</sup> goes so far as to argue that the advertising campaign to persuade consumers to eat these 'novel' products amounts to an infringement of individual freedom. However, the opening of the political debate, perhaps reflecting consumer voice, is an important development.

#### 9.5.2. boycotting Nestlé

The most well known boycott, that of Nestlé products, started in Britain in 1977 following 'The Baby Killers' report published in 1974 by *War on Want* <sup>54</sup>. Nestlé's inappropriate marketing of baby milk formulations to mothers in the Majority World, has been seen as the 'worst excesses of producer interests' <sup>55</sup>. The recess in the boycott from 1984, when it seemed agreement had been reached with the company, may have caused confusion among consumers. Jewel for instance thought the campaign over.

Although subsequent boycotts may be 'too numerous and too parochial', Gabriel & Lang note significant successes in the use of consumer boycotts. However, Nestlé is trying to commodify a new area, baby milk. Here Fine & Leopold's insight is again important. Food producers are inevitably restricted by human consumption limits <sup>56</sup>; there are even limits to affluent obesity. There is therefore particular pressure to commodify any further consumption areas. As I have argued above, where other profitable options are available to producers new products are likely to be marketed in response to boycott or significant consumer distancing. However, it is difficult to see what alternatives, socially beneficial or otherwise, Nestlé could pursue in the face of the boycott against *commodification*. The boycott offers no profitable niches.

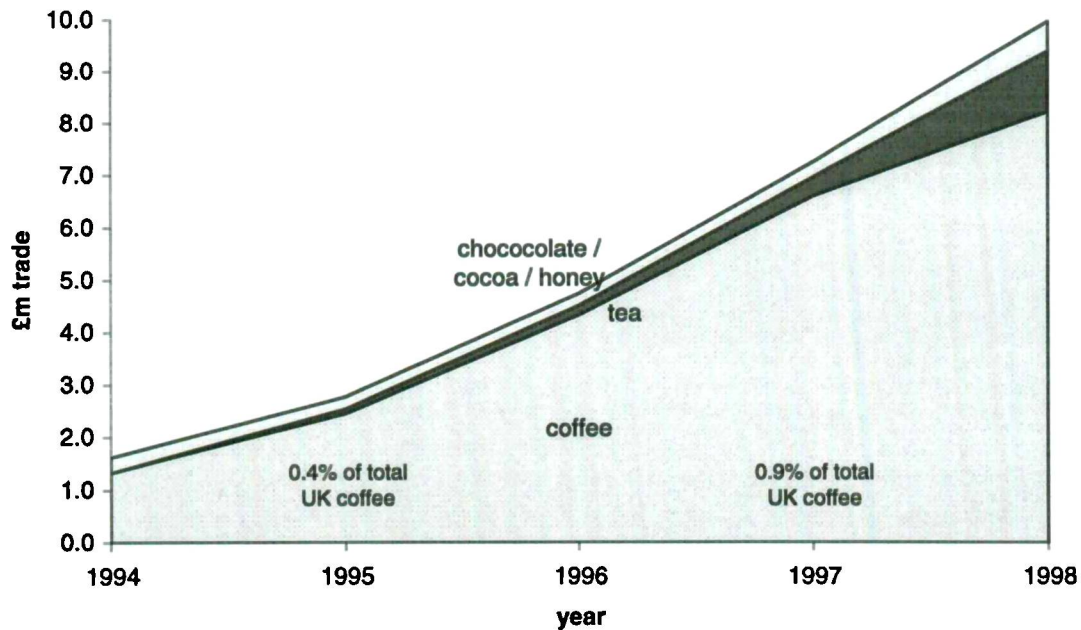
In this case consumer activists, Fine & Leopold admit, having the benefit of a readily defined product and strong argument, by strenuous efforts 'held [commodification] at bay'. Consumer voice and exit have thus far been very effective. Although the primary product is readily defined the boycott itself is necessarily directed at Nestlé products in general. More that one co-researcher noted that as the company acquires and markets more products the technical difficulties for the boycotting consumer multiply; exit has not proved easy.

### **9.5.3. boycotting fair traded coffee**

The coffee campaign is highly effective. On a small budget the FairTrade 'brand' attracts a 12% public recognition<sup>57</sup> which in business terms is a considerable achievement. Most of my co-researchers were aware of the campaign. In line with the common theme in this thesis, responses to this campaign varied. Whilst Janice and Louise were responding to the new emphasis and buying from a supermarket, Misha, who might have behaved similarly had he known, continued to buy alternatively. Alan bought fair traded brands though with significant reservations but, like Natasha, purchased from alternative shops. James had distanced himself from the product altogether. In spite of the complex relationship between this clear ethical consumer boycott discourse and the individual consumer concerns fair traded coffees have made a *small* but increasing inroad into the market (Figure 9.3).

That Elaine is sympathetic to fairly traded coffee but still buys commercial brands and others additionally buy connoisseur brands indicates the considerable element of fashion in the market. Like many, the coffee market is in a process of differentiation placing larger 'brands' under some pressure. The differentiating market also puts pressure on fair trade producers to offer speciality products or remain a niche choice.

*Figure 9.3 fair traded coffee as a proportion of UK coffee sales*



Note: the figures for fair traded coffee were provided by the Fair Trade Foundation; UK coffee sales taken from Nestlé's 'Hot Beverage Report 98' page 9.

Accrediting commercial products, as has been the case with tea, may facilitate further market penetration. Sales of tea accredited by the Foundation have increased to a little over £1m since they were introduced in 1994; again a small market proportion. From the data presented in this thesis it seems consumers may not be clear about, or necessarily in agreement with, evolving NGO strategies. Further problems may arise therefore with the commercial / alternative producer divide.

#### **9.5.4. the clean clothes campaign**

I am interested to set ethical consumers within Fine & Leopold's materialist analysis of clothes provisioning and Janneke van Eijk's review of the 'clean' clothes campaign. From its beginnings in the Netherlands in 1990, van Eijk sets out the progress of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC). Its adoption in other European countries in the mid-1990s is typical of what I have referred to as the second generation discourse (9.4.1). The promotion of Majority World traditional craft clothes which predates the CCC would always remain a niche market. Many activists argued that an improvement in world trade relations would require a shift of emphasis from 'alternative' products to intervention in

the corporate clothes industry. Code of Conduct campaigns aimed, therefore, at the chain of manufacture and supply but through the major retailers.

Among my ethical consumers there are a number of clothes 'strategies'. Not all motivation is ethical and the ethics is rarely easy to separate but such considerations as labour issues are significant. Like Bob, Natasha buys some second hand clothes. Both have a financial incentive to buy cheaply. Bob enjoys the politics of subverting the clothes of the affluent. Natasha [nat-att: 11-17] seems to see her solution as distancing herself from consumerism when she says:

*I'm getting more and more into buying second-hand clothes. Again this is from, partly from financial perspective also I like the idea that people aren't producing more and more clothes on my behalf. I'm wearing other peoples cast-offs. I think that is really good. [...] Erm... so my reasons are basically it's cheaper and you don't have to be quite so wary of the production process because it's...its not first hand.*

James takes a similar line but seems still to be concerned about materials used for the garments.

The major ethical consumer discourse with respect to clothes centres around labour issues. Fine & Leopold attribute prevalence of poor labour conditions convincingly to the failure of the industry to achieve mass production<sup>58</sup>. The weakness of manufacturers relative to distributors and increasingly retailers is therefore historically determined. Whilst the formal NGO discourse, the CCC, therefore focuses on labour conditions; my examples of ethical consumers do not necessarily do the same.

For James and Natasha the key theme is to distance themselves from overproduction. Elaine and Alan go to some lengths to distance themselves from animal products. Peter relates his consideration to the NGOs' first phase, traditional clothing from the Majority World when he says he does not want to become a 'hair shirt' person. Although I do not



know, I would surmise that so long as Robert bought durable and unpretentious clothes locally his project would be satisfied. Only Janice [jan-att: 98-104] seems to be more or less 'on message'.

*For some time my daughter and I have been buying clothes at New Look. On the first few occasions we bought without thinking of ethical issues. However, as the prices were very competitive I began to wonder where the products were made and by whom. I looked for a label but on all the items we have the only labels is 'New Look'. There is no country of origin. Since enquiring in the shop, and being told that it is not their policy to disclose the source of their products I have become a bit suspicious. They claim that their policy of silence was to protect their source from rival outlets. I intend to write to their head office to see if I can get more information.*

Janice was right to be concerned. *New Look* was among retailers not rushing to participate in the Codes of Conduct<sup>59</sup>. Even here Janice's solution is to try (one could imagine with some difficulty) to buy products manufactured in affluent countries although she is not unaware of the problems of home-workers. The CCC was actively recruiting consumers during the early nineties. The questions Janice, and others, asked of retailers were exactly what the campaign wanted to complement their official approaches but, in this case, Janice had internalised the problem of low pay and poor working conditions rather than followed the instructions.

I am not suggesting that, say Alan might buy a product recklessly unconcerned for its Majority World producers, or that Natasha might uncritically buy leather clothes. The data suggest neither of these is likely. Nevertheless the prime issues that co-researchers report motivating them do seem to vary and in specific relation to their project. The complexity therefore of the issues surrounding clothing in consumer capitalism present difficulties in relation to co-opting significant numbers of ethical consumers.

#### **9.5.5. financial services**

The banks are at the centre of unprecedented large and uncontrolled global financial transactions. At the local level services are over supplied to the affluent and subject to considerable restructuring. This restructuring is in terms of demutualisation, rationalisation by technological capitalisation and withdrawal of services to poor areas. My data suggest that this has presented some ethical consumers with considerable difficulty. Even Belinda [bel-ssi: 170-174], perhaps the most peripheral of my ethical consumers becomes concerned when her bank downsizes staff.

A long running criticism of the banks has been against their involvement in and stimulation of Majority World debt. Although War on Want's campaign *Profits out of Poverty* began in 1986<sup>60</sup> some ethical consumers have only recently been sensitised to this primarily through the Jubilee 2000 campaign. However again diverse approaches were noted among my examples. For instance, remarkably differing views were expressed on the possibility of distancing oneself from this unethical lending practice by boycotting the Cooperative Bank. Thus searches, sometimes unsuccessful, to find more acceptable alternatives to the Cooperative Bank occurred. Also some co-researchers moved accounts away from demutualised building societies. In this process ethical consumers made unintended financial gains.

Some success in the marketing of ethical banking and investment products has occurred but the issues are clearly complex. Additionally, in view of the downsizing in financial services, disapprovingly mentioned by Belinda, the story does not suggest entirely sovereign ethical consumers.

#### **9.5.6. markets, strategies, campaigns, consumers**

The above are distinct cases. The plethora of responses to the intensification of food production and especially the reduced eating of meat has stimulated the research for alternatives by 'big and powerful interests' in the agro-chemical industry in the 'battle ground'<sup>61</sup> of food production. It provides the opportunity for further controlling the food

production process but it is difficult to see how such *capital accommodations* can unequivocally be co-opted to signify success. Although these changes may bring the increasingly powerful retailers into conflict with producers over consumer demands there are thus opportunities for innovation and profitability. The response to ethical concerns in the highly competitive financial services market provides the opportunity for niche marketing but as yet seems to have had little effect on the sector as a whole. Again conflicting consumer demands makes the construction of an ethical niche problematic. By contrast with these baby milk formula is an attempt by producers to commodify a new market. The NGO campaign is not primarily aimed at responsible marketing but at reversing that commodification. There is no 'just' alternative. In the clothing industry specific consumer responses seem more or less unrelated to changing activist discourses.

What I hoped to illustrate by these cases has been:

- the well documented value of relating consumer behaviour (in this case, ethical) to specific systems of provision;
- the fragmentary but not at all necessarily ineffectual nature of individual consumer ethics, and;
- the rich variety of interaction between ethical consumer discourse and individual political philosophy.

## **9.6. chapter summary**

I have argued that there is a legitimate understanding of ethical consumers apart from any collective purpose. In a society where consumption has become detached from production but is more or less the only form of subsistence the 'affluent' must make choices. The argument that where choices are available we have a duty to consider them ethically seems both theoretically credible and empirically supported.

Nevertheless at the social level ethical consumption is evaluated primarily in respect of the positive effects it might be expected to achieve. Such a process has, I have suggested, a

history, perhaps as long as capitalist markets, but the *circumstances* are new. Because the circumstances bring into relief the contradictions in consumer capitalism, environmental degradation exacerbated by growing inequality, the morality of intensifying production systems etc., they bring into question the sustainability of our lifestyles. Within such a system, with an inadequately theorised (political) economy, the role of consumers with morals is inevitably highlighted.

The developing focus of conventional ethical consumer discourses is not directly reflected by consumers. Even where a clear lead is given, as in the coffee campaign, ethical consumers adopt a diversity of behaviours. However, even where the discourse itself is more fragmented, as with that on intensive agriculture, the diversity of consumer behaviours may not necessarily render the action ineffective.

I have argued elsewhere that even where relatively strong links between producers and consumers through well known labels can be established, as is the case with the FairTrade mark, the notion that aggregate purchases unproblematically send messages is questionable<sup>62</sup>. I would have to disagree with Zadek & Almeric's assertion that "... there are no *a priori* limits to the potential scope of civil actions."<sup>63</sup> In respect of networked ethical consumer action I suspect there are considerable but perhaps unpredictable potentialities but limits on the possibilities of regulating markets through consumer behaviour alone. These limits require further exploration.

In this chapter I have resisted the characterisation of consumer as either hero or victim. Instead I have tried to accept that consumers also have a part to play in checking the more destructive, less ethical features of consumption. Likewise the profit motive in producers is strong yet there are elements that seek to follow a more ethical line.

notes and references:

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- <sup>1</sup> Zadek, Lingayah & Murphy (undated).
- <sup>2</sup> Harcourt (1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Zadek & Amalric (1998).
- <sup>4</sup> This is the term used by Grover (1986) to explain inertia in the face of seemingly overwhelming problems.
- <sup>5</sup> From the semi-structured interview with Natasha [nat-ssi: 228].
- <sup>6</sup> Singer (1997), original 1993.
- <sup>7</sup> Giddens (1998), pp34-37.
- <sup>8</sup> Meiklejohn, (1998), p30.
- <sup>9</sup> Zadek & Amalric, (1998); Crowe (1998).
- <sup>10</sup> Bech-Larsen (1996).
- <sup>11</sup> Thøgersen cited in Ölander & Thøgersen (1995).
- <sup>12</sup> Elliot (1999).
- <sup>13</sup> Zadek & Amalric (1998), p11.
- <sup>14</sup> Birchall (1994).
- <sup>15</sup> Rudé (1981), p40.
- <sup>16</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993) develop this notion of continuing food adulteration in some detail.
- <sup>17</sup> See for instance Whitty (1990) where he notes the first moves towards a public choice ideology in education and Kavanagh & Morris (1989) who trace New Right policies more generally to the mid 1970s.
- <sup>18</sup> Similar prominence to Thatcher's speech is given by Ward (1990), p221.
- <sup>19</sup> For instance Brown (1995) and Foxall (1994).
- <sup>20</sup> Zadek & Amalric (1998).
- <sup>21</sup> Dall & Toft (1996).
- <sup>22</sup> Standbakken (1995).
- <sup>23</sup> Hirschman (1979).
- <sup>24</sup> Birch (1998).
- <sup>25</sup> Felicity's narrative supports this view [fel-att: 120-123].
- <sup>26</sup> Moorehouse (1998).
- <sup>27</sup> Hirschman (1979), p102.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p 100.
- <sup>29</sup> Where Hirschman (1979) p102/3 relates his argument to public goods, in line with my argument I have substituted corporate goods.
- <sup>30</sup> Here I borrow Ekins & Neef's (1992) term referring to economics beyond heroic assumptions.
- <sup>31</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995).
- <sup>32</sup> Zadek, Lingayah & Forsteter (1998), p5.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p10.
- <sup>34</sup> I am indebted to Phil Wells director of the *Fair Trade Foundation* for a conversation on this subject in March 1999.
- <sup>35</sup> van Eijk (1998).
- <sup>36</sup> Zadek, Lingayah & Murphy (undated).
- <sup>37</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993).
- <sup>38</sup> Warde (1992).
- <sup>39</sup> Sparks (1999), p171.
- <sup>40</sup> Rayner & Lang (1997).

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- <sup>41</sup> Lang (1998).
- <sup>42</sup> Anthony for instance was particularly knowledgeable on the issue of non-meat diets.
- <sup>43</sup> The data includes figures produced by NOP, Taylor Nelson and MORI.
- <sup>44</sup> Keane & Willitts (1995) report that most of those misunderstanding the term 'vegetarian' are interested in the supposed health benefits of the diet rather than any ethical ramifications.
- <sup>45</sup> Mintel (1998).
- <sup>46</sup> The 1998 NOP poll for Animal Aid suggested that 31% of adults believe a vegetarian diet to be healthier than a meat diet, just over half as many as believe the opposite: <http://www.vegsoc.org/info/statveg>.
- <sup>47</sup> For instance the 1998 NOP poll for Animal Aid suggested that 86% of adults believe that all animals have a right to a life free from cruelty and abuse. And NOP poll for the 1997 RSPCA 78% said they would like to see better welfare conditions for Britain's farm animals. Because such polls often use leading questions, I am taking these as indicative rather than in any way definitive.
- <sup>48</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993).
- <sup>49</sup> Gallup (1984/5/6).
- <sup>50</sup> Mintel (1993).
- <sup>51</sup> Kinderman (1998).
- <sup>52</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993), p157.
- <sup>53</sup> Beekman (1999).
- <sup>54</sup> See 'A Brief History of War on Want' (undated) p33.
- <sup>55</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993), p162.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p165.
- <sup>57</sup> Phil Wells of the *Fair Trade Foundation* made this point in conversation.
- <sup>58</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993), p95.
- <sup>59</sup> ECRA (1994), p9.
- <sup>60</sup> I confirmed the date with *War on Want* by telephone.
- <sup>61</sup> Rayner & Lang (1997).
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Zadek, & Amalric (1998), p13.

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## 10. towards an understanding of 'ethical consumers'

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In this concluding chapter I draw together my empirical findings, summed in chapter eight, and the discussion of consumer capitalism in chapter nine. My arguments are necessarily more speculative at this stage because my examples of ethical consumers are not representative of the population. Importantly therefore I begin by reviewing my research and outlining what I see as needing further investigation in this area.

I would argue that my work is of more than academic interest. I have suggested elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that in spite of its obvious market orientation the politics of consumer ethics is generally too conservative to have its roots in neo-liberalism. Where it is radical it is more concerned with social justice. On the other hand consumer activism is able to act across regional, national and species boundaries. The obvious impact of consumers in affluent countries illustrated above has led to debates about the nature and effectiveness of ethical consumption. It may be the privilege of the affluent to be ethical consumers or not, but the effects, beneficial or otherwise, are felt by the poor and if only for this reason the phenomenon is worthy of study. My intention is not to overstate its significance. Rather to point to significant themes primarily relating to *consumers' consumption, patterns and projects* but also to the 'discourses' of *governments, businesses, marketing, campaign groups and society*.

### **10.1. researching ethical consumers**

I took some time, more than a year, developing and refining my theoretical understanding of ethical consumers in relation to the literature. My original research proposal implied a words / deeds inconsistency although I was unaware at the time that this was the subject of considerable debate. As I developed my understanding I rejected the notion of such an inconsistency as a useful way to understand the relationship between consumers attitudes and behaviour and moved towards a notion of a daunting

decision making environment. Whilst some would criticise theorising prior to investigation, I have argued that I had (inevitably) begun with ideas about the phenomenon. Since at least in part I rejected these it was, I suggest, wise to review them, and to be clear about them rather than feign impartiality.

My focus on the theoretical difficulty of decision making led me towards a theory that addressed such a situation: bounded rationality - decision processes and procedures where attention is limited; and philosophical rationales - reasoning and propositions for underpinning human ethical behaviour. Bounded rationality, as a group of ideas, encompasses *both* deliberative and systematic decision making and therefore does not restrict the researcher to either notion. I employed these concepts within case study research, not as restrictive methodologies, but research orientations facilitating possible understandings of co-researchers' positions. In order that these theoretical orientations would not determine the outcome, the methodology has been primarily based on 'open' processes. This is evidenced in the invitation to co-researchers to make a *subjective* indication of the ethical motivation behind their purchases and to present their own narratives, and the mostly open questioning in the semi-structured interviews. I further validated my data by opening my synopses of co-researchers' positions to their scrutiny.

The reliability of the data was increased by the fact that whilst I have accepted the co-researcher's considered version of events I and my co-researcher have not accepted just any version [see chapter three]. Where the (triangulated) data have not supported the version given we have reconsidered. Jewel's is perhaps the most direct example of this process. Her claim to buy fair traded coffee was in contradiction to her purchase receipts. During the course of the study Jewel's circumstances changed and she and her husband started buying only fair traded coffee. We discussed this in the interview. I was treated to a rich insight into the importance they attached to fair trade but also the difficulty of some circumstances and of attending to all ethical issues.



Receipt collections and co-researcher narratives provided an excellent basis for informing the semi-structured interviews. There were exceptions to the adequacy of data. Peter for instance had trouble in remembering to ask for receipts, collecting only about 30%, and Louise, Belinda and Lucy sent short narratives all under three hundred words. These proved sufficient however when explored in the interview and I would not hesitate to use a similar approach again.

Some data collection methods, such as the self-recorded reports on consumer durable acquisitions, proved of marginal value. However, the majority of methods I used very successfully triangulated in an efficient, developmental process leading to valuable insights and good general understandings. As a result I have fulfilled the prime requirement which I set, and produced sixteen case studies of ethical consumers that I would argue are very credible. It is evidence of this that we are not left wondering why these consumers do not do what they say. We are able to understand, if not agree with, their position, noting the way they have resolved problems and in some cases able to speculate on other ways of doing so. The case studies I have produced are also, of course, empirical studies of consumers in accordance with Miller's identified need in this field of study.

My data are consistent with the view that where strong expressions about conventional ethical (consumer) issues are reported to academic and market researchers employing extensive data collection methods, these must be set against respondents' other more egoistic concerns. However, I would now go further to say that the reported attitudes themselves need interpretation. Belinda, for example, responded to my questionnaire on *her* uncommunicated understanding that 'progress' is to be understood as underpinned by science, Peter on *his* uncommunicated understanding that he is embroiled in an *unresolved* dialectic between consumerism and sustainability. These are vital pieces of information, the absence of which render specific responses unintelligible.

I believe I have presented the first *integrated* view of ethical consumers offering explanations of how they manage the opportunities, challenges and constraints of ethics in consumer capitalism. There is, however, much to do and this is the subject of the next section.

#### **10.1.1. future research**

I suggest three further areas of research which would develop and clarify the present study by applying different methodologies or perspectives to the same phenomenon. The three areas are: *extending* the present research; using a *longitudinal* approach and; *broadening* into a range of related research topics.

Extending the present research:

1. in terms of habitats to locate perhaps significantly different ethical consumer projects. It would be for instance valuable to study high commitment rationalising ethical consumers such as affluent celebrities who lend their name to one or more of the conventional ethical consumer discourses and low attention rationalising ethical consumers, say, who shop at Body Shop, and;
2. redesign to assess the proposition that active and engaged ethical (subjective or specified) consumption is limited regardless of income.

A longitudinal approach would be required to investigate:

1. the development and degradation of individual ethical consumer projects;
2. significant changes of buying patterns and;
3. didactic, dialectic and behavioural processes in (the ethics of) consumption looking more closely at the relationship between consumers and pressure groups.

With respect to new areas for related research, I believe there is a need to:

1. develop profiles of so called 'armchair ethical'; those expressing some relevant concerns but who are on the periphery of ethical consumption;

2. develop possibilities of bounded rationality approach in general consumer theory;
3. consider the development of conventional ethical consumer discourse and make comparisons between cultures (UK, Europe, US etc.) and;
4. apply a systems approach to (ethics and) consumption as proposed and outlined by Pantzar towards an understanding of the evolving consumer society and therefore limitations to change and intervention strategies.

### ***10.2. towards a political philosophy of 'ethical consumers'***

The people I worked with, my co-researchers, are ethical consumers in the sense that they reported positive attitudes concerning those issues identified by market researchers at the time as constituting ethical consumption. Additionally ethics influenced some or many of their purchases. If the extensive research is to be believed, they are examples of a not insignificant group of consumers in the adult British population: Mintel's 40% 'strong and weak ethicals' or HPI's 60% 'activists and waverers'. Given our undoubted effect as consumers, for better or worse, the study of such an important group seems to me to be vital to social science and political policy.

This brings me to the broad question set in the introduction: in what way does, and potentially could, ethical consumerism contribute to indicative / political regulation of the market and sustainability?

#### **10.2.1. consumer works v. producer works**

Arguments in favour of viewing consumer activism as perhaps the most important mechanism of our time for bringing about change are premised on the concept of an active individual consumer. Thus Zadek & Amalric<sup>2</sup> say:

*If we therefore understand the path towards sustainable development as a conscious, active process, it follows that the key link between consumption and sustainable development concerns the practice of people's conscious and active individual and collective reflections, decisions and actions regarding what is consumed, moulding what is available to consume, and influencing the way in which such goods are produced, traded and consumed.*

'Moulding' consumer capitalism seems remarkably close to the concept of consumer sovereignty proposed by von Mesis. 'Influencing' is somewhat less *gung-ho*. Just as von Mesis' theory depended on a 'free' (competitive) market and the rational consumer so the different claims of Zadek & Amalric, in addition to collective action, require information and a *conscious and active* individual. However, the research presented here suggests that, in practice, individual engagement in conscious and active ethical consumption is limited. It follows that exact consumer regulation of the market, as implied by von Mesis, especially in terms of ethics, is utopian.

The aim of achieving measurable benefits to others, on the other hand, finds parallels in my study and especially I would refer to the support for ethical consumerism expressed by Louise. As I have noted Glover<sup>3</sup> has argued that a benefit can be considered valuable however far short of some notional utopian aim it falls. This is because under different, less demanding, circumstances the same benefit would be welcomed. The fact that, say, fair trade interventions do not result in all trade in that commodity being undertaken to the same standard is not sufficient justification of consumer inaction in respect of the products so labelled.

Measurable improvements in life-chances of human and other animals *can be demonstrated* to have occurred at least in part as a result of ethical consumer activity<sup>4</sup>. Conversely it is important to note the dangers inherent in mass consumer action. The most obvious case here would be that of child labour where consumer concerns underpinned the proposed

legislation in the USA on child labour that were said<sup>5</sup> to threaten the livelihoods of poor children.

Reversing the argument, it may equally be said that valuing limited improvements is not a justification for abandoning larger aims. Alternative radical provisioning remains restricted to a minority supply system and agreement on more comprehensive benchmarking and Codes of Conduct for the commercial sector may, at best, be viewed as in its infancy. Other ways of valuing the results of networked ethical consumer action may be admitted. Simon Zadek, Sanjiv Lingayah, & Sara Murphy argue that the growing success of ethical consumption can be seen additionally in the influence, positive or otherwise, that it is having on commercial companies and the changing political agenda more broadly.

For instance they say, “[i]ronically, one sign of success [of rugmarked carpets] is that fake labels can now be purchased”<sup>6</sup>. Such an argument implies that we are to understand the rise of capital accommodations to ethical consumption as signalling that social justice trade initiatives have begun to take effect. Zadek *et al.*, note a number of avoidance strategies in respect of carpets. They also respond to Morehouse’s<sup>7</sup> argument with regard to Union Carbide. Following the corporate manslaughter of ten to twenty thousands of workers and local inhabitants in Bhopal, Ward Morehouse says the company divested its interests that directly supplied consumers. This strategy avoided consumer action and Morehouse takes this as an illustration of the superior position of capital in relation to consumers. In response Zadek *et al.*,<sup>8</sup> argue that such accommodations carry a cost. In an increasing number of cases, they say, the costs of compliance with (reasonable) consumer ethics will be less than those of confronting or avoiding consumer action. A similar argument was forwarded with respect to racism in corporate recruitment policy<sup>9</sup>. Drawing on this experience, the argument holds true in so far as the costs of non-compliance are high, as in the USA, but much less where that is not so as in the UK. Since ethical consumerism, in terms of the costs it exacts, is a market mechanism, Zadek *et al.*,

may have the better argument where producers are less able to divest their interface with consumers as is the case with big retailers for instance. However, the capacity of some commercial producers to avoid and absorb, or even subvert and profit from, the ethical demands of consumers should not be underestimated as Morehouse shows in respect of avoidance. Both arguments have value; consumers lack power in some circumstances but are not entirely to be dismissed.

Conversely, although I would not agree, it may be argued that this very fragmented producer response reflects well the fragmentation, egoistic and ethical, in consumer demand. From the mid-seventies the market liberal political philosophy was in the ascendant. Its public choice rhetoric coincided with the growing espousal of moral relativism in academic work and was buoyed by the argument that there was anyway no alternative (TINA) to individualised market relations. The importance of challenging this agenda was voiced most clearly by Robert in my study but similar views may be inferred as being held by others and have been expressed by academics such as Nick Robins & Sarah Roberts<sup>10</sup> in respect of consumption activism. Evidence of functioning alternative markets in this formulation are necessary to challenge the fatalistic arguments employed to significant effect since the mid-1970s.

Whether companies try to insulate themselves from civil action or, as in the case of the rugmark, governments, manufacturers and exporters cooperate to promote an alternative social label, social justice politics are, it is argued, setting the agenda. Following a period of ego-ethics, where Zadek says conventional political channels have proved barren, this represents an important claim.

Thus what Gabriel & Lang refer to as the 'fourth wave' of consumer action is presented as part of a new (market) political project. In spite of the fashion for philosophical relativism, I have argued that ethical consumerism has firm philosophical foundations, and is a notion that cannot easily be dismissed. However it does not correspond to the regulatory system of agglomerated superficial preferences proposed by the market

liberals. Similarly it falls far short of any utopian ideas of a new market mechanism for social justice. It is rightly presented as a very contingent and speculative notion of partially networked consumers.

#### **10.2.2. 'semi-organised' consumers acting as individuals**

Fine & Leopold<sup>11</sup> argue, from their review of food production and consumption, that consumers' "... influence is most marked when their interests are collectively represented (and hence have been formed in some way other than through the market) and most notably but not exclusively through the state ...". Drawing on my data, I have argued that there is considerable imitation which signifies a strong collective element to ethical consumerism. However, I found little evidence of state discourse. Perhaps such regulation, as in the case of unleaded petrol, becomes so accepted that it is no longer considered an ethical issue. I would want to be less dismissive than Fine & Leopold of seemingly individualised action. My review of sixteen consumers in systems of provision [chapter nine] suggests a significantly fragmented activism both in terms of the collective discourses adopted and individual political philosophy. At the same time this fragmentation, especially in the case of dietary change, does not necessarily diminish the impact of consumers on production.

Whilst I fully agree with Fine & Leopold that insufficient attention is often paid to the interaction between producers and consumers, and that currently disproportionate attention is being given to the latter, I disagree that fragmented action is necessarily ineffectual. What seems important is whether some fractions of production can benefit from the action taken by consumers.

Both Miller, and Gabriel & Lang, refer to the polarisation of politics that has restricted consumer study. Consumers are alternatively theorised to be sovereign individuals or collective victims. I would argue that Fine & Leopold's work is crucial to the understanding of consumer capitalism. Their denial of the significance of individualised action, I suggest however, stems from this historical divide.

But how could individualised ethical consumers, adrift in a sea of information, misinformation and discourse, be other than confused and impotent? My data suggests that they are remarkably able to *rationalise* their 'confusing' position, *distance* themselves from the perceived problems and / or become *integrated* in the critical discourse. There is still some confusion, especially where issues are newly engaged or relevant discourses are not available. Nor are ethical consumers entirely settled in their projects; they are often not. I mean that in each case my co-researchers presented a sufficiently resolved and coherent position to support their consumer action. Their behaviour is more or less consistent with this and accordingly includes ethical consumption. Although what I have referred to with some reservations as co-researchers' projects may remain relatively stable over time (James' is an example of a radical change from a 'McDonalds' lifestyle however) the means by which they achieve them is not. Given that I did not undertake a longitudinal study it is significant that changes in consumer behaviour, sometimes quite abrupt, were noted.

As Gabriel & Lang argue there is increasing fragmentation of consumers. We may now add fragmentation among ethical consumers in respect of their various projects and in some cases the relative isolation of consumers from conventional ethical consumer discourses. Gabriel & Lang also point to the 'insecurity [...] experienced across social classes'<sup>12</sup> to suggest that individual consumer projects will be less manageable and predictable in future. Again in this study there is evidence to suggest that changes in social contexts [7.2.1] and insecure circumstances affect ethical consumption. In her last reply to my study [Appendix I] Lucy wrote:

*You may be interested to know that we've had some misfortune lately & my shopping patterns have had to change a bit but I still shop "ethically" when I can afford it.*



I have suggested that the relationship between ethical consumption and income is relative. However insecurity produces relative changes in fortune. The data are therefore compatible with Gabriel & Lang's reading of fragmentation and unpredictability.

I suggest that the difficulty of managing fragmented consumer protagonists, albeit predominantly with a commitment to consumer living, is at the heart of the producer response. As Gabriel & Lang<sup>13</sup> argue with regard to boycotts: "... it does not matter [... so much] what are the objects of current boycotts, as that a succession of boycotts constantly mobilise consumers to remind manufacturers, merchandisers and retailers that they have moral and environmental responsibilities." Thus a political philosophy which explains ethical consumers can be neither that of the sovereign consumer nor of collectivised consumer action. Nor can ethical consumers be 'heroes of consumer capitalism'.

Narrowly conceived 'strong' ethical consumers are too few, widely conceived they are too complicit. Ethical consumption is I would argue best viewed as a, perhaps politically uncomfortable, complex of increasingly global collective discourses, mediated by diverse individual consumers in affluent but also increasingly in less affluent societies. But the mediation occurs in such a way that no consumer market is insulated from the possibility of unpredictable moral panics; the possibility that underpins the power of conventional ethical consumer discourses.

Ethical consumers are often 'semi-organised'. Smith is correct to ascribe an important role to pressure groups in respect to processing and presenting information but I have deliberately chosen to use one of Gabriel & Lang's descriptions: 'semi-organised'. This is to stress the complex and mediated nature of the relationship between consumers and pressure groups. The allegiance consumers give to selected campaigns is highly differentiated by their political philosophy and contextual situations.

### **10.2.3. individuals and social discourses**

My examination of the heuristics employed by co-researchers suggests significant common ethical consumer discourses. None of these however is universally held by the

sixteen ethical consumers. Both competing discourses held by different consumers and seemingly contradictory discourses expressed by one consumer were found. Perhaps the most fundamental fracture is illustrative of this. The fracture relates to the responsiveness of capitalist enterprises. Large corporations may alternatively be held to be ethically safe to patronise because they have a reputation to uphold or unethical because they are profit maximisers and (perhaps unintentional) moral minimisers.

There is some evidence that these discourses mirror the divergent public discourses. In public there is a fundamental divide between promoters of radical alternative fair trade production, often but not always not-for-profit and/or cooperative, and market reformers who seek to influence capitalist enterprises. Such a divide is not at all surprising in view of the historical debate between radicals and reformers in the British labour movement. I would suggest from this parallel that ethical consumer heuristics are embedded in such historical discourses.

Consumers may be in touch with one or more social discourses and out of touch with others; engaged in the dialectic formation of discourse or mere recipients of instructions. The heuristics that seemed to me to underpin some of my co-researchers' narratives may be best viewed as derived from a complex of pre-existing debates.

#### **10.2.4. consumers' 'projects'**

Whilst there is a clear social context to ethical consumption with identifiable collective discourses, individual ethical consumer projects, even within the small number of examples in this study, assume a wide variety of forms. However, consumers can be seen as simplifying their decision making by using many strategies predicted within the theory of bounded rationality. These include: limited searching inevitably concluding in satisficing; the application of varying and sometimes conflicting heuristics; considerable imitation of some valued or trustworthy others; intuition (or prejudice) central to some projects. All of these occur within varying contextual constraints and habits.

However, even employing abbreviated decision processes and procedures, it is simply impracticable to be a 'perfect' ethical consumer. This is because many of the issues raised are no more amenable to resolution than most moral mazes, for the average affluent consumer the scope of potential application is considerable and extending, and in a dynamic market decision reappraisal is required. Consumers can therefore be seen as adopting strategies, a by-product of which is to render their project manageable.

To make these strategies understandable, I have proposed ideal types as '*rationalising*', '*distancing*' and '*integrating*'. In the schema proposed in this study, rationalisers have reasons for limiting the attention they give to consumption in terms of their ethics; the reasons vary perhaps almost infinitely. Distancing notionally sets the consumer apart from the offending production process. This may involve various dietary restrictions, buying second-hand or in the case of 'downshifter' consuming significantly less than average of their society whilst having the capacity to increase their income and consume more. Integrators try to bring many or all aspects, consumption, work and socialising within the core ethical ideas which give meaning to their lives. The core ideas and those of conventional ethical consumption are synonymous.

In practice the examples in the study adopted these different coping strategies in combinations and to differing degrees. By this device I hope to have presented what otherwise seemed as an infinite variety of projects within a relevant and understandable framework.

I have argued from the data that whilst deliberately reducing consumption decreases the potential for individual consumer impact it may increase the capacity for attending to issues. The potential scope for impact may thus remain more or less constant over a wide consumer income range.

#### **10.2.5. stability and volatility in 'projects'**

The relationship between social discourses and individual projects is complex and non-linear. Whilst I have referred to projects as individual they might more usefully be seen as

micro-social in the sense that they are formed, and occasionally re-formed, within the milieu of immediate social circles. The consideration of context allows individuals to be presented as rational if, to differing degrees, subscribing to problematical and contradictory discourses. Such a presentation is in direct contrast to, for instance, concepts of words / deeds inconsistency which, I have argued are mostly a function of fragmentary research approaches.

I would describe most of my co-researchers as receptive to developing discourses.

However such openness is conditional. Consumer actions are mediated by immediate social relationships, occupational and consumption patterns and individual philosophies where some tensions *may be* apparent. It has been argued from the data that ethical consumer projects act as paradigms. They seem relatively stable processes until disturbed by sufficient contradictory discourse, when they become volatile. Triggers of behaviour change may also, however, be unrelated to ethical consumer discourse.

#### **10.2.6. ethics in the market**

Ethical consumers operate primarily in a market relationship with producers and suppliers. Public discourses directly or indirectly about ethical issues in consumer capitalism are played out between numerous campaign groups, government, the media, and corporations. Governments of different persuasions, of course, will be more or less supportive of the notion of ethical consumerism and increasingly<sup>14</sup> battles over the ethics of production and consumption are going to litigation. However the primary market relationship is considered by some to be an effective transmitter of information. In the case of the ethics of consumption, I have argued that such a concept is flawed. Accepting the well rehearsed limitations of the theory of consumer sovereignty it may still be argued that in general terms the market is superior to the process of democratic collectivism in registering individual preferences. To this extent it is a very valuable system.

I have argued elsewhere<sup>15</sup> that for two fundamental reasons the market is a poor transmitter of ethical information and if ethical consumers are to fulfil a more significant quasi-political role supplementary processes are required. Firstly common concerns, say with the fair treatment of labour, are transmitted in fragmentary form because of the possible variety of individual and collective projects. Consequently different consumer behaviours motivated by the same ethical concern may cancel each other out. Secondly due to what Hirschman refers to as loyalty, exit (and the non-market mechanism, voice) is delayed in ethically deteriorating situations. Additionally consumers can only react (in the market) to what is on offer, and as noted above, producers may try to avoid, absorb and subvert ethical challenges. This is not to argue that the market, and therefore ethical consumerism, has no place in reformist theory. Quite the opposite. However, it is to suggest that because market 'messages' are delayed and cannot be readily decoded, strength of feeling is likely to be underestimated and direction of feeling will be confused. In extension of Hirschman's evaluation, I have suggested that delayed exit and voice produce an unsatisfactory and volatile market situation<sup>16</sup>.

What is very clear from the analysis is that *singular* strategies either in respect of marketing ethical products, or with respect to political projects to manipulate or enlist consumer behaviour, *may* succeed but to some extent at the cost to other concerns. They are therefore inappropriate to any broad strategy. One ethical consumer accepts what another rejects. Additionally attempts to influence such a group towards further ethical concerns might be successful in respect of those concerns but have costs elsewhere.

I must add a final twist. One of the main conclusions of Craig Smith's early work on ethical consumers is that the market must offer choice. More recent commentators agree<sup>17</sup>. This is not of course the superficial choice of the market economists between two or more indistinguishable commodities. It is choice in Gabriel & Lang's terms allowing Singer's ultimate (consumer) choice. Here is perhaps the central paradox in market systems because ultimate choice is exactly what many ethical consumers in affluent societies do

not want; many, but not all, would prefer superficial choice. Smith is wrong to accept so simple a formula, but I need to illustrate my argument.

Widespread support could be found among ethical consumers in favour of clothes *entirely free from either child labour or exploited labour*. What remains of choice are social considerations of style. Likewise vegetarians, vegans, consumers of free range meat are unlikely to want 'cruelty free' as a choice, although that is a primary demand, but rather as a social norm. It is for this reason, I have argued, that they should be considered to remain 'members' even when they have 'exited' from the offending products. Few ethical consumers can ultimately *want* choice about these matters and yet some seem pessimistic and all continue to exercise choice.

Where we need conformity, and it seems that this must be what ethical consumers concerned with consequences want, regulation and the democratic processes should be more appropriate than market mechanisms. Here we address a central dilemma. Klaus Rippe<sup>18</sup> recently argued: "It would be a pity if our choices were limited in the domain of food, [...but...] choosing food is not important enough for our identity and well-being that a liberty right and state activity could be justified." He was considering the not unlikely event of novel foods dominating the market. We would not, in his view, have a right to traditional food let alone to curb the production of novel ones. I disagree, but such a debate places the ethical consumer project at the very heart of political polemics.

#### **10.2.7. marketing ethics**

To view the subject of the thesis in what might seem a reverse fashion I might say that ethical consumers have four primary stakeholders. Producers and suppliers have a concern in terms of niche opportunities and threats to their profitability. Governments have an interest to the extent that they wish to promote significant concerns of citizens in the market. They may look to consumer power to underpin their own legitimacy where this has been weakened by economic globalisation. Campaign groups have an interest in mobilising support and action in their given direction. And finally other consumers are

concerned since an important strand in ethical consumer thinking seems to be the desirability of collective action.

Whilst I have argued elsewhere that the notion of ethical consumerism is not compatible with all political projects, in practice there is considerable interest in 'making ethical consumerism work' from diverse political perspectives. From my analysis I would suggest it is important for those wishing to increase the political effectiveness of ethical consumption in general to direct their attention towards 'armchair ethical'. This is because they might be encouraged to incorporate conventional ethical consumer behaviour into their consumption as opposed to rearranging existing patterns of ethical consumption. My research suggests the potential for specific consumer actions is considerable. Here there is much to play for.

#### **10.2.8. summarising the future of ethical consuming**

Individual duties and virtuous living seem sufficient to maintain a considerable degree of ethical consumption in affluent societies. Choice in such societies is often seen as constituting a duty to consider the ethics in consumption. Conventional ethical consumer discourse however does not equate with individual consumer projects. Pressure groups may be seen as clarifying and encoding issues but consumers decode them as they wish<sup>19</sup> and that might mean they are, or are thought by some individuals to be, irrelevant. This unpredictability however may even enhance the political effectiveness of ethical consumer campaigns.

The aggregation of consumer actions does not send (ethical) messages through the market as supposed by public choice theorists although significant exits (or boycotts) or patronage (or buycotts) may focus attention. More likely consumer behaviour and voice set positions in the struggle for meaning about the ethics of consumption in which consumers and producers as well as governments and pressure groups are debating the elements in which they are themselves implicated.

In these conditions the profile of ethical concerns in consumption is likely to be raised. Further commodification will widen the scope within which concerns may occur. The restlessness of capitalist production will constantly raise novel ethical considerations. These same trends may tilt the balance between the efficacy of democratic regulation and market discipline further towards a notion of consumer power. The ethical consumer is not only unlikely to disappear, but to occupy an enhanced position in the political life of humanity.

### **10.3. advising Charles Jennings**

If you remember the reporter from the *Guardian* newspaper asking how could he become a virtuous consumer, you may be thinking that I should, having completed the study, be able to advise him better. My advice, a vehicle to restate some key points, would start with a question: *do you really mean to ask how you can become virtuous?*

It seems to me that to flourish as a virtuous ethical consumer demands that you have the *courage* to reorganise your life, possibly quite radically. To be *benevolent* and *generous* as a consumer is not something that can be undertaken partially or half-heartedly. Let us suppose that Jennings, like most of us, is too comfortable and fast living a consumer, say, to *distance* himself from the 'excesses' of consumer capitalism and enjoy the alternative pleasures of an intimate consumption regime such as James'.

Perhaps it would be better for him to direct his consumption to achieve good consequences. There are of course far too many opportunities to join in campaigns, as he says, but at least two solutions seem viable. In both cases, in political terms, the actual focus of his interest may be less important than that he does something. By becoming one of many unmanageable consumers he would be contributing to the situation where producers are advised to take account of ethical issues.

As a journalist, he is well placed to re-orientate and absorb himself in whatever ethical causes he feels most strongly about. Of course, in so far as it is possible, he would be wise



to *integrate* his consumption to accord with his espoused cause. But at least he would, as an individual, be doing his bit. In this course of action his life would be full and meaningful and he would be able to console himself that he could do no more.

Alternatively he might accept that he revels in consumer society, in whatever various ways. It is after all not Jennings' lonely task to put the world to rights. Here I would recommend a little reading of Griffith. Just because things seem overwhelming this is not a justification for inaction. My advice is to review some of the boycotts and boycotts on offer with effectiveness in mind. Which (within your capacity to respond) is likely to have an effect about which you would approve? Satisfice *rationality*, don't try to review all possibilities before choosing, and then get on with living.

notes and references:

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<sup>1</sup> Newholm (1999b).

<sup>2</sup> Zadek & Amalric (1998), p12.

<sup>3</sup> Glover (1986).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Ransom (1995), p29; Zadek, Lingayah, & Murphy (undated); Crowe (1998); ECRA (1998 Oct.) with regard to people and Hopley (1998), p97 with regard to cosmetic testing on other animals.

<sup>5</sup> Meiklejohn (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Zadek, Lingayah, & Murphy (undated).

<sup>7</sup> Morehouse (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Zadek, Lingayah, & Murphy (undated), p34.

<sup>9</sup> Luthra (1997), p142.

<sup>10</sup> Robins & Roberts (1998). See also Gabriel & Lang (1995), pp170-172.

<sup>11</sup> Fine & Leopold (1993), p161.

<sup>12</sup> Gabriel & Lang (1995), p190.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p146.

<sup>14</sup> Buckingham & Crowe (1999), p23 note the risk of litigation companies face across a range of ethical issues and the McLibel case, now continuing into an appeal, illustrates this point.

<sup>15</sup> Newholm (1999a) and (1998).

<sup>16</sup> Newholm (1999a).

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton (1996).

<sup>18</sup> Rippe (1999).

<sup>19</sup> It would clearly here be interesting to relate Stuart Hall's (1973) concepts of 'encoding' and 'decoding' and its developments to this relationship.

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#### **Ethical Consumer Study - 1997/8**

If you agree that what we buy as consumers is important for the future, please read on. I am carrying out research at the Open University into people, like me, who sometimes buy things because they believe there is some ethical reason for choosing that product; 'ethical consumers'. There has of course been similar research before but it has not really told us much about how we make difficult decisions and that is important to know if we are to be able to make 'ethical products and services' more successful.

Of course, I want to persuade you to take part in this study so this is what I think you should get from it:

- I hope you would enjoy exploring some of the things you do;
- you will receive, and be able to review, a copy of your contribution;
- also, when I complete the work, I will send you an outline of the final research findings and;
- you will have the satisfaction of contributing to a study which seeks to improve the marketing of ethical products.

But this is not just another questionnaire survey. We need to go into greater depth about how we make decisions and how that fits into our lives in general. To help you decide if you would be able to contribute I enclose a sheet setting out what your commitment would be.

If you decide to take part, please fill in and return the attached questionnaire in the post paid envelope as soon as possible. I will forward the next stage of the study to you.

Thank you

Terry Newholm

## Appendix B : questionnaire (reduced size on two pages)

### CONSUMER AND ETHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

**Directions:** This survey asks about any environmental and other ethical concerns you may hold. For each of the issues shown below, if you are extremely concerned, tick box 5, if you are not at all concerned, tick box 1 and so on. If you do not hold an opinion please leave the row blank.

#### A. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

How concerned are you about each of the following environmental issues?	not at all	not very	quite	very	extremely
	1	2	3	4	5
1. the Ozone layer depletion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. water pollution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. forest destruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. maximising recycling of materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. global warming (greenhouse effect)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. dangers arising from nuclear power	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. acid rain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Have you any other environmental concerns?

If so please outline them here:

un-natural methods producing un-natural "foods" (genetic engineering, large-scale single-crop farming, over-use of chemicals - - -)

#### B. COMMERCIAL AND TRADE CONCERNS

How concerned are you about each of the following activities of some companies?	not at all	not very	quite	very	extremely
	1	2	3	4	5
9. irresponsible promotional claims	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. trade with oppressive regimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. adverse conditions of trade between nations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. political contributions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. irresponsible selling policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. human rights records of firms and suppliers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. selling / manufacturing armaments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Have you any other similar ethical concerns?

If so please outline them here:

### C. ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS

How concerned are you about each of the following issues?

	not at all 1	not very 2	quite 3	very 4	extremely 5
17. testing cosmetic products on animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. testing medical products on animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. factory farming animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Have you any other animal welfare concerns?

If so please outline them here:

use of animals in adverts - eg. P.C.T.'s. Mokeys.

### D. PERSONAL DETAILS

21. Sex Female ☒ Male ☐

22. Age 17 and under ☐ 18-32 ☐ 33-47 ☒ 48-62 ☐ 63+ ☐

23. Which group would best describe your total household income?

Up to £4,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20,000-£29,999	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
£5,000-£9,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£30,000-£39,999	<input type="checkbox"/>
£10,000-£14,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40,000-£49,999	<input type="checkbox"/>
£15,000-£19,999	<input type="checkbox"/>	£50,000 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>

24. How many people does this income provide for? 2 number

25. Our/my household income is mainly from: (please tick one only of these options)

Self-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social security	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment in not-for-profit, public or voluntary sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shares dividends and investments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment with private company or PLC.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pension	<input type="checkbox"/>

### E. FURTHER RESEARCH

26. We intend to continue this research including personal interviews. Would you be prepared to *consider* taking part? YES ☒ NO ☐

27. If you would, please give your name, daytime contact telephone number and address:

NAME	<input type="text"/>	ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
	( )		
Date	/ / 1997	Post code:	

*Lucy and address*

ref: research/method: question

*Thank you for your time*

## Appendix C : guide to making the self-recorded audio tape

### Guide to making the self-recorded audio tape



Ethical Consumer  
Study - 1997/8

ref: research/method: 1Guide97

Please read all this guide before you begin.

The audio tape is for you to record details, or you might think of them as stories, about things you have bought. Please try to recall **up to three** events where you have bought something in each of these occasions:

1. Where you succeeded in buying something which satisfied some ethical beliefs you have.  
Where you tried but succeeded in buying something which satisfied some ethical beliefs but not others.
2. Where you tried but failed to buy something which satisfied some ethical beliefs you have.
3. Where you bought something but didn't try to satisfy your ethical beliefs and perhaps offended them.

So up to 12 stories. Please write your (chosen) name on the tape label. Before you start each story, please say whether it is an occasion 1, 2, 3 or 4; a 'success', 'partial success', 'failure' or 'didn't try'. You may want to list the things you are going to talk about before starting.

In choosing what you want to tell me about don't restrict yourself. The purchase might be a product or a service like banking or a hairdo; it might be a big item like a car or refrigerator or relatively insignificant like a packet soup. Your purchase might be new, it might be second-hand.

To avoid real problems with memory you should probably not try to recall events of more than a year ago. However, you may want to include *one* item that you buy regularly, because it is important to you, but where the original reasons are lost in the mists of time. It might be wise to avoid telling me about a purchases made since you heard about this study unless you feel the reason for making them would certainly have occurred anyway. What is most important is to try to give a truthful rather than 'helpful' account; if you really cannot recall some aspect or, say, are unsure of competing motives, say so.

*To help you to decide what your story might include, consider:*

- What were your main concerns at the time; what were you trying to achieve?
- Who or what influenced what you wanted; any past experience, friends, publications etc.?
- What was the situation when you made your purchase; where were you and was this a usual or special shopping trip?
- Had you considered other possibilities, looked elsewhere?
- In retrospect do you think it was a good decision, did it achieve what you wanted and so would you repeat it?

The stories on the audio tape I recorded lasted about four minutes each so they all went on one side. Before starting the recording, I noted of each of the purchases I planned to talk about and made a little use of the pause button when I couldn't recall what I was going to say. I did find that I had afterthoughts; making the recording prompted fresh ideas. You may also find you want to tag on some ideas at the end.

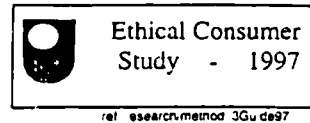
*I hope you enjoy making the recording!*

*thanks - Terry Newholm*

Please return the completed tape to me in the prepaid envelope by the date requested on the accompanying letter. If you have any difficulties please telephone me at home on 01234 218545 or at the Open University on 01908 653441

## Appendix D : guide to collecting and marking receipts (reduced size)

### Guide to collecting and marking receipts



Please read all this guide before you begin.

I would like you to collect receipts for *products and services* you buy over a four week period starting as soon as possible:

- please ask for a receipt if one is not offered;
- note on any receipt which does not say what product or service it was for;
- most receipts have the retailers name on them but if not please jot it down and;
- underline any receipt items when you feel your 'ethical' attitudes have positively influenced your choice;
- mark with an asterisk\* any receipt when you feel your 'ethical' attitudes could have influenced your choice.

I realise that you may not be able to keep a strictly complete record of all purchases over a month but please try to get as near as possible. It does not matter where you begin in a month just carry on until the four weeks is complete. It will probably help to carry a special envelope in which to keep your receipts.

Some of this will be easier, I hope, because supermarkets and other shops with electronic scanning tills, say, mostly give you an itemised list. Don't forget to include consumer services, like meals out, take-aways, travel, banking etc., as well. Don't include large financial items like a mortgage. Credit card payments, and other occasions where you will want to keep the receipt could be photocopied or separately recorded for the month.

Please fill in this panel when you have completed collecting receipts:

What is the approximate proportion of receipts you have managed to collect for the period?

nearly all receipts ☒ approx. 90% +  
more than three-quarters receipts ☐ 75% +  
most receipts ☐ 63% +  
more than half receipts ☐ 50% +  
other:

Any problems?:

Possibly not a typical  
four-week period  
food-wise as we are  
moving soon &  
emptying rather than  
re-stocking as freezers

NAME [ Lucy ]  
DATE [ 28 / 07 / 1997 ]

*I hope the task is not too arduous!*

*thanks - Terry Newholm*

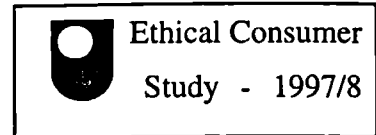
Please return the completed receipts and this guide to me in the prepaid envelope when they are complete.  
If you have any difficulties please telephone me at home on 01234 218545 or at the Open University on 01908 653441

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## Appendix E : reasons for selecting a product or service

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Respondent information guide



ref: research/method: 4guide97

Reasons for selecting a product or service:

**Price:** you had a price *limit* in mind.

**Quality:** you particularly looked for an item which met particular (high) quality requirements. Use this category broadly to include, say, exclusivity, a special colour, healthy, efficient products or services etc., except where you consider this quality to be sought for 'ethical' reasons.

**Convenience:** you wanted to make shopping easy; may be its close or access is convenient.

**Customer service:** you particularly looked for somewhere where staff were knowledgeable, courteous etc.

**Environment:** you had a concern for environmental issues (over-packaging, use of resources, recyclability etc.).

**Animal:** you had a concern for animal rights issues (testing products on animal, factory farming etc.).

**Social:** you had a concern for social, commercial and trading issues (fair trading, human rights, armaments dealing etc.).

**Other:** what?









### Appendix G : service purchase sheet (reduced size)

Preliminary respondent information sheet3

Ethical Consumer  
Study - 1997

Name: LOUISE

ref: research/method: res3info

Date: 30/4/1997

Record no: CS4

Services purchased recently/regularly										
Service item	Supplier / type	Purchase frequency	Reason for selection of product: Price, Quality, Convenience, Customer service, Environment, Animal, Social							
			P	Q	Co	Cu	E	A	S	Other / clarification
Holiday/s	House Exchange	Yearly	1						2	
Restaurant regular eat-out		monthly	1	2	3				4	
Hairdresser	Verde			1						
Fitness club										
Other leisure services	new / change									
Banking	Barclays Nat. West new / change				1	2				
Other financial services										
Domestic services										
Childcare services										
Gardening services										
Other services										
			total							
			%							

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## Appendix H : note from Olivia Kate

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What is the approximate proportion of receipts you have managed to collect for the period?

Any problems?:

I recorded on the tape  
and rubbed it off again,  
~~It wasn't working~~  
I don't actually buy  
things I consider are  
unethical.  
Can you still use the tape?

nearly all receipts  
more than three-quarters receipts  
most receipts  
more than half receipts  
other:

approx.  
☒ 90% +  
☐ 75% +  
☐ 63% +  
☐ 50% +

NAME [ Olivia ]

DATE [ 22 / 2 / 1997 8 ]

*I hope the task is not too arduous!*

*thanks - Terry Newholm*

---

Please return the completed receipts and this guide to me in the prepaid envelope when they are complete.  
If you have any difficulties please telephone me at home on 01234 218545 or at the Open University on 01908 653441

## Appendix I : letter from Jewel

Address

Dear Terry. Sorry this is late, I was on holiday again. I have made a few amendments; you may find my age. My daughters were extremely concerned about 'late nature'. Also, we are vegetarians of many years.

3 summit 3rd world debt demonstration on 7/1

I am known as  
but if you are changing the names anyway I suppose it doesn't matter. Do give me something grand - I rather fancy Julia!

I am really keen on your study, I do wish you well with it - do tell me the outcome next year

Best wishes - & friend

Jewel

0

## Appendix J : Robert's synopsis comments

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primarily as part of the 'outworking' of that Puritan tradition which has a bedrock of ethics. In this way he says he can assert that it is wrong to despoil the environment or to dominate others. He will not want to value material things above people and will react adversely where he believes this to be occurring. It is he says important for the survival of such values that they are vigorously supported.

on the border of affluent + poor

feels the tension on regards inequality  
when moved to present house (17 years ago),  
'house husband' role (young children). Shifted  
towards full employment - all work  
selected for 'public good'

this rather overstates my share of the  
shopping, and its local bias \*  
and 'main shop' doesn't convey the ~~food~~  
change from "one big shop" to a series of  
smaller outlets/perceives

\* Although Name said that, although  
his wife still does some of the <sup>weekly</sup> shopping  
in a supermarket, he now does much  
more of the shopping in small local  
stores

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Appendix K : 'another unreliable hippy'

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I don't like to say cee cee things  
other fall but I know you'll  
understand, cos you said you would.  
I'm enclosing your tape, I hope you  
don't think I'm cheeky using your  
envelope.



---

## Appendix L : note from Lucy

---



### Technology Faculty

The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA

Telephone (01908) 274066  
Direct Line (01908) 653441  
Fax: (01908) 652175  
Telex 825061 OUWALT G  
T.J.NEWHOLM@OPEN.AC.UK

ref: letters: 7CONTACT.DOC (10)

systems department

16 July, 1998

Address

Dear Lucy

#### Ethical Consumer Study - 1997/8

Thanks again for taking part in my study ~~Name~~ I enclose a synopsis of your case for your consideration. I am very keen that I should have your comments on this both with regard to accuracy and acceptability.

Yours is one of a series of 'thumbnail sketches' of those who contributed to my study. If I have been successful you should perhaps feel neither flattered nor insulted by the sketch but I do apologise if there is any aspect that annoys you; I have tried to take some care with the wording. It is of course difficult, without being a literary genius, to write as short an outline as this. It risks trivialising a person's life. However, the very important aim is to provide a concise reference point for each case when the thesis is being read and this is considered central to presenting case study methodology.

I have decided that I shall be changing all the names of those in the study following agreement of these sketches to ensure anonymity.

My study is progressing well thanks to the fine contributions my respondents have made. I have presented two papers so far to small conferences. At the moment, I am lucky enough to have an assistant putting the data I have collected on computer and so have no excuse for not completing early next year. Please read the synopsis and return it to me with any comments as soon as possible and preferably before the 14th of August.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Terry Newholm', followed by a horizontal line.

Terry Newholm

I've kept the synopsis (hope you don't mind) - it's fine - no problem with it.

You may be interested to know that we've had some misfortune lately & my shopping patterns have had to change a bit but I still shop "ethically" when I can afford it. Ax



## Appendix M : James' synopsis comments

5/11/98

Dear Terry I am sorry at replying to your letter at such a late date  
I have since moved home and have only just been forwarded your letter

My new address is address

I am pleased with your synopsis of my working consumer situation.  
It is accurate to estimate perhaps up to a third of my income is spent  
on a growing comic library; I had not comics to my friends.  
My diet has progressed into being more or less wholly organic at present.

Seasons greetings

Ranpoth

James

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## Appendix N : letter from Natasha

With best wishes

Terry Newholm

Terry Newholm

Well, I'll spend the time  
just sitting around with this  
letter. I didn't get the synopsis first  
time round either so please forgive me  
and I'll send a reply asap New phone  
no is 1 Telephone No. 2. Yes always fairtrade tea  
coffee, cocoa, sugar etc. (Mother would slap my  
wrists if I didn't!) But I try (not very hard around  
exam time when coffee's the only nice thing that  
makes revision viable!) to drink peppermint tea -  
I don't like the idea of addiction & caffeine seems  
a particularly foolish one!

Hope you're on the mend - did you go over  
the handstands? It seems that's the way that  
all cyclists knacker their shoulders up & in  
off to the physio tomorrow (again!) - mine still  
isn't right.

It's now 5:12 I'm finishing my course, doesn't  
time fly! and already find myself using  
words like 'equitable' and 'contractual'  
in my everyday speech for so much.

See you to the synopsis.

Natasha